OF

Dramatick Poesie,

AN

ESSAY.

BY

JOHN DRYDEN, Esq;

..... Fungar vice Cotis, acutum
Reddere quæ ferrum valet, exors ipsa secandi.

Horat. de Arte Poet.

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DOMINUS ILLUMINATIO MEA

TO THE

Right Honourable

CHARLES

EARL of

Dorſet and *Middleſex*,

Lord Chamberlain of Their Majeſties Houſhold; Knight of the moſt Noble Order of the Garter, &c.

My LORD,

AS I was lately reviewing my looſe Papers, amongſt the reſt I found this Eſſay, the writing of which in this rude and indigeſted manner, wherein your Lordſhip now ſees it; ſerv'd as an Amuſement to me in the Country, when the violence of the laſt Plague had driven me from the Town. Seeing then our Theaters ſhut up, I was engag'd in theſe kind of Thoughts with the ſame Delight with which Men think upon their abſent Miſtreſſes: I confeſs I find many things in this Diſcourſe

which I do not now approve; my Judgment being not a little alter'd ſince the writing of it; but whether for the better or the worſe I know not: Neither indeed is it much material in an Eſſay, where all I have ſaid is problematical. For the way of writing Plays in Verſe, which I have ſeem'd to favour, I have, ſince that time, laid the Practice of it aſide, till I have more leiſure, becauſe I find it troubleſome and ſlow. But I am no way alter'd from my Opinion of it, at leaſt with any Reaſons which have oppos'd it. For your Lordſhip may eaſily obſerve, that none are very violent againſt it, but thoſe who either have not attempted it, or who have ill ſucceeded in their attempt. 'Tis enough for me to have your Lordſhip's Example for my excuſe in that little which I have done in it; and I am ſure my Adverſaries can bring no ſuch Arguments againſt Verſe, as thoſe with which the fourth Act of *Pompey* will furniſh me in its Defence. Yet, My Lord, you muſt ſuffer me a little to complain of you, that you too ſoon withdraw from us a Contentment, of which we expected the continuance, becauſe you gave it us ſo early. 'Tis a Revolt, without occaſion, from your Party, where your Merits had already rais'd you to the higheſt Commands, and where you have not the excuſe of other Men, that you have been ill us'd, and therefore laid down Arms. I know no other Quarrel you can have to Verſe, than that which *Spurina* had to his Beauty, when he tore and mangled the Features of his Face, only becauſe they pleas'd too well the Sight. It was an Honour which ſeem'd to wait for you, to lead out a new Colony of Writers from the Mother-Nation: and upon the firſt ſpreading of your Enſigns, there had been many in a readineſs to have follow'd ſo fortunate a Leader; if not all, yet the better part of Poets.

Pars indocili melior grege; mollis & expes
Innominata perprimat cubilia.

I am almoſt of Opinion, that we ſhou'd force you to accept of the Command, as ſometimes the *Prætorian* Bands have

have compell'd their Captains to receive the Empire. The Court, which is the beſt and ſureſt Judge of Writing; has generally allow'd of Verſe; and in the Town it has found Favourers of Wit and Quality. As for your own particular, My Lord, you have yet Youth, and Time enough to give part of them to the Divertiſement of the Publick, before you enter into the ſerious and more unpleaſant Buſineſs of the World. That which the *French* Poet ſaid of the Temple of Love, may be as well apply'd to the Temple of the Muſes. The words, as near as I can remember them, were theſe:

Le jeune homme, à mauvaiſe Grace,
N'ayant pas adoré dans le Temple d'Amour:
Il faut qu'il entre, & pour le ſage
Si ce n'eſt pas ſon vray ſejour
C'eſt un giſte ſur ſon paſſage.

I leave the words to work their effect upon your Lordſhip in their own Language, becauſe no other can ſo well expreſs the Nobleneſs of the Thought; and wiſh you may be ſoon call'd to bear a part in the Affairs of the Nation, where I know the World expects you, and wonders why you have been ſo long forgotten; there being no Perſon amongſt our young Nobility, on whom the eyes of all Men are ſo much bent. But, in the mean time, your Lordſhip may imitate the Courſe of Nature, who gives us the Flower before the Fruit: that I may ſpeak to you in the Language of the Muſes, which I have taken from an excellent Poem to the King.

As Nature, when ſhe Fruit deſigns, thinks fit
By beauteous Bloſſoms to proceed to it;
And while ſhe does accompliſh all the Spring,
Birds to her ſecret Operations ſing.

I confeſs, I have no greater Reaſon, in Addreſſing this Eſſay to your Lordſhip, than that it might awaken in you the deſire

deſire of writing ſomething, in whatever kind it be, which might be an Honour to our Age and Country. And methinks it might have the ſame effect on you, which *Homer* tells us the Fight of the *Greeks* and *Trojans* before the Fleet, had on the Spirit of *Achilles*; who, though he had reſolv'd not to ingage, yet found a Martial Warmth to ſteal upon him, at the Sight of Blows, the Sound of Trumpets, and the Cries of fighting Men. For my own part, if, in treating of this Subject, I ſometimes diſſent from the Opinion of better Wits, I declare it is not ſo much to combate their Opinions, as to defend my own, which were firſt made publick. Sometimes, like a Scholar in a Fencing-School, I put forth my ſelf, and ſhow my own ill Play, on purpoſe to be better taught. Sometimes I ſtand deſperately to my Arms, like the Foot when deſerted by their Horſe, not in hope to overcome, but only to yield on more Honourable Terms. And yet, My Lord, this War of Opinions, you well know, has fallen out among the Writers of all Ages, and ſometimes betwixt Friends. Only it has been proſecuted by ſome, like Pedants, with violence of words, and manag'd by others like Gentlemen, with Candour and Civility. Even *Tully* had a Controverſie with his dear *Atticus*; and in one of his Dialogues makes him ſuſtain the part of an Enemy in Philoſophy, who in his Letters is his Confident of State, and made privy to the moſt weighty Affairs of the *Roman* Senate. And the ſame Reſpect which was paid by *Tully* to *Atticus*, we find return'd to him afterwards by *Cæſar*, on a like occaſion, who, anſwering his Book in praiſe of *Cato*, made it not ſo much his Buſineſs to condemn *Cato*, as to praiſe *Cicero*.

But that I may decline ſome part of the Encounter with my Adverſaries, whom I am neither willing to combate, nor well able to reſiſt; I will give your Lordſhip the Relation of a Diſpute betwixt ſome of our Wits on the ſame Subject, in which they did not only ſpeak of Plays in Verſe, but mingled, in the freedom of Diſcourſe, ſome things of the

the Ancient, many of the Modern ways of Writing; comparing thoſe with theſe, and the Wits of our Nation with thoſe of others: 'tis true, they differ'd in their Opinions, as 'tis probable they would: neither do I take upon me to reconcile, but to relate them: and that as *Tacitus* profeſſes of himſelf, *Sine ſtudio partium aut irâ:* without Paſſion or Intereſt; leaving your Lordſhip to decide it in favour of which Part you ſhall judge moſt reaſonable, and withal, to pardon the many Errours of

Your Lordſhip's

Moſt obedient humble Servant,

John Dryden.

TO THE
READER.

THE Drift of the enſuing Diſcourſe was chiefly to vindicate the Honour of our Engliſh *Writers, from the Cenſure of thoſe who unjuſtly prefer the* French *before them. This I intimate, leſt any ſhould think me ſo exceeding vain, as to teach others an Art, which they underſtand much better than my ſelf. But if this incorrect Eſſay, written in the Countrey without the Help of Books, or Advice of Friends, ſhall find any Acceptance in the World, I promiſe to my ſelf a better Succeſs of the Second Part, wherein I ſhall more fully Treat of the Virtues and Faults of the* Engliſh *Poets, who have written either in this, the Epique, or the Lyrique way.*

A N

AN ESSAY OF Dramatick Poesie.

IT was that memorable day, in the first Summer of the late War, when our Navy ingag'd the Dutch: A day wherein the two most mighty and best appointed Fleets which any Age had ever seen, disputed the command of the greater half of the Globe, the commerce of Nations, and the riches of the Universe. While these vast floating Bodies, on either side, mov'd against each other in parallel Lines, and our Country-men, under the happy Conduct of his Royal Highness, went breaking, by little and little, into the Line of the Enemies; the noise of the Cannon from both Navies reach'd our Ears about the City: so that all Men, being alarm'd with it, and in a dreadful suspence of the event, which they knew was then deciding, every one went following the sound as his fancy led him; and leaving the Town almost empty, some took towards the Park, some cross the River, others down it; all seeking the noise in the depth of silence.

Amongst the rest, it was the fortune of *Eugenius*, *Crites*, *Lisideius* and *Neander*, to be in company together: three of them persons whom their Wit and Quality have made known to all the Town: and whom I have chose to hide under these borrowed names, that they may not suffer by so ill a relation as I am going to make of their discourse.

Taking then a Barge which a Servant of *Lisideius* had provided for them, they made haste to shoot the Bridge, and left behind them that great fall of waters which hindred them from hearing what they desir'd: after which, having disingag'd themselves from many Vessels which rode at Anchor in the *Thames*, and almost blockt up the passage towards *Greenwich*, they ordered the Watermen to let fall their Oares more gently; and then every one favouring his own curiosity with a strict silence, it was not long ere they perceiv'd the Air to break about them like the noise of distant Thunder, or of Swallows in a Chimney: those little undulations of sound, though almost vanishing before they reach'd

them, yet ſtill ſeeming to retain ſomewhat of their firſt horrour which they had betwixt the Fleets: after they had attentively liſtened till ſuch time as the Sound by little and little went from them; *Eugenius* lifting up his head, and taking notice of it, was the firſt who congratulated to the reſt that happy Omen of our Nations Victory: adding, that we had but this to deſire in confirmation of it, that we might hear no more of that noiſe which was now leaving the *Engliſh* Coaſt. When the reſt had concurr'd in the ſame Opinion, *Crites*, a Perſon of a ſharp Judgment, and ſomewhat too delicate a taſte in Wit, which the World have miſtaken in him for ill Nature, ſaid, ſmiling to us, That if the concernment of this Battel had not been ſo exceeding great, he could ſcarce have wiſh'd the Victory at the price he knew he muſt pay for it, in being ſubject to the reading and hearing of ſo many ill Verſes, as he was ſure would be made on that Subject. Adding, That no Argument could ſcape ſome of thoſe eternal Rhymers, who watch a Battel with more diligence than the Ravens and Birds of Prey; and the worſt of them ſureſt to be firſt in upon the Quarry, while the better able, either out of Modeſty writ not at all, or ſet that due Value upon their Poems, as to let them be often deſired, and long expected! There are ſome of thoſe impertinent People of whom you ſpeak, anſwer'd *Liſideius*, who, to my knowledge, are already ſo provided, either way, that they can produce not only a Panegyrick upon the Victory, but, if need be, a Funeral Elegy on the Duke: wherein, after they have crown'd his Valour with many Laurels, they will at laſt deplore the odds under which he fell, concluding that his courage deſerv'd a better deſtiny. All the Company ſmil'd at the conceit of *Liſideius*; but *Crites*, more eager than before, began to make particular exceptions againſt ſome Writers, and ſaid the publick Magiſtrate ought to ſend betimes to forbid them; and that it concern'd the Peace and Quiet of all honeſt People, that ill Poets ſhould be as well ſilenc'd as ſeditious Preachers. In my Opinion, replied *Eugenius*, you purſue your Point too far; for as to my own particular, I am ſo great a Lover of Poeſie, that I could wiſh them all rewarded, who attempt but to do well; at leaſt, I would not have them worſe us'd than one of their Brethren was by *Sylla* the Dictator: *Quem in concione vidimus (ſays Tully) cum ei libellum malus poeta de populo ſubjeciſſet, quod epigramma in eum feciſſet tantummodo alternis verſibus longiuſculis, ſtatim ex iis rebus quas tunc vendebat jubere ei præmium tribui, ſub ea conditione ne quid poſtea ſcriberet.* I could wiſh, with all my heart, replied *Crites*; that many whom we know were as bountifully thank'd upon the ſame condition, that they would never trouble us again. For, amongſt others, I have a mortal Apprehenſion of two Poets, whom this Victory with the help of both her wings, will never be able to eſcape; 'tis eaſie to gueſs whom you intend, ſaid *Liſideius*; and without naming them, I ask you if one of them does not perpetually pay us with clenches upon words, and a certain clowniſh kind of Raillery?

If

If now and then he does not offer at a *Catachreſis* or *Cleveland*iſm, wreſting and torturing a word into another meaning: in fine, if he be not one of thoſe whom the *French* would call *un mauvais buffon*; one who is ſo much a well-willer to the Satyr, that he intends, at leaſt, to ſpare no Man; and though he cannot ſtrike a blow to hurt any, yet he ought to be puniſh'd for the malice of the Action; as our Witches are juſtly hang'd becauſe they think themſelves to be ſuch: and ſuffer deſervedly for believing they did miſchief, becauſe they meant it. You have deſcribed him, ſaid *Crites*, ſo exactly, that I am afraid to come after you with my other extremity of Poetry: He is one of thoſe, who having had ſome advantage of Education and Converſe, knows better than the other what a Poet ſhould be, but puts it into practice more unluckily than any Man; his Stile and Matter are every where alike; he is the moſt calm, peaceable Writer you ever read: he never diſquiets your Paſſions with the leaſt concernment, but ſtill leaves you in as even a Temper as he found you; he is a very Leveller in Poetry, he creeps along with ten little words in every line, and helps out his Numbers with *For to*, and *Unto*, and all the pretty Expletives he can find, till he drags them to the end of another line; while the Senſe is left tir'd half way behind it: he doubly ſtarves all his Verſes, firſt, for want of Thought, and then of Expreſſion; his Poetry neither has Wit it, nor ſeems to have it; like him in *Martial*.

Pauper videri Cinna vult, & eſt pauper:

He affects Plainneſs, to cover his want of Imagination: when he writes the ſerious way, the higheſt Flight of his Fancy is ſome miſerable *Antitheſis*, or ſeeming Contradiction; and in the Comick, he is ſtill reaching at ſome thin Conceit, the Ghoſt of a Jeſt, and that too flies before him, never to be caught; theſe Swallows which we ſee before us on the *Thames*, are the juſt reſemblance of his Wit: you may obſerve how near the water they ſtoop, how many proffers they make to dip, and yet how ſeldom they touch it: and when they do, 'tis but the ſurface: they ſkim over it but to catch a gnat, and then mount into the Air and leave it. Well, Gentlemen, ſaid *Eugenius*, you may ſpeak your pleaſure of theſe Authors; but though I and ſome few more about the Town may give you a peaceable hearing, yet aſſure your ſelves, there are multitudes who would think you malicious, and them injur'd: eſpecially him whom you firſt deſcribed; he is the very *Withers* of the City: they have bought more Editions of his Works than would ſerve to lay under all their Pies at the Lord Mayor's *Chriſtmaſs*. When his famous Poem firſt came out in the year 1660, I have ſeen them reading it in the midſt of Change-time; nay, ſo vehement they were at it, that they loſt their Bargain by the Candles ends: but what will you ſay if he has been received amongſt great Perſons? I can aſſure you, this day, he is, the envy of one, who is Lord

in the Art of Quibbling; and who does not take it well, that any man ſhould intrude ſo far into his Province. All I would wiſh, replied *Crites*, is, That they who love his Writings, may ſtill admire him, and his Fellow Poet, *qui Bavium non odit, &c.* is Curſe ſufficient. And farther, added *Liſideius*, I believe there is no Man who writes well, but would think he had hard meaſure, if their Admirers ſhould praiſe any thing of his: *Nam quos contemnimus, eorum quoque laudes contemnimus.* There are ſo few who write well in this Age, ſaid *Crites*, that methinks any praiſes ſhould be welcome; they neither riſe to the Dignity of the laſt Age, nor to any of the Ancients; and we may cry out of the Writers of this time, with more reaſon than *Petronius* of his, *Pace veſtrâ liceat dixiſſe, primi omnium eloquentiam perdidiſtis:* you have debauched the true old Poetry ſo far, that Nature, which is the Soul of it, is not in any of your Writings.

If your quarrel (ſaid *Eugenius*) to thoſe who now write, be grounded only on your Reverence to Antiquity, there is no Man more ready to adore thoſe great *Greeks* and *Romans* than I am: but on the other ſide, I cannot think ſo contemptibly of the Age in which I live, or ſo diſhonourably of my own Countrey, as not to judge we equal the Ancients in moſt kinds of Poeſie, and in ſome ſurpaſs them; neither know I any reaſon why I may not be as zealous for the Reputation of our Age, as we find the Ancients themſelves were in reference to thoſe who lived before them. For you hear your *Horace* ſaying,

Indignor quidquam reprehendi, non quia craſsè
Compoſitum, illepidéve putetur, ſed quia nuper.

And after,

Si meliora dies, ut vina, poemata reddit,
Scire velim pretium chartis quotus arroget annus?

But I ſee I am ingaging in a wide Diſpute, where the Arguments are not like to reach cloſe on either ſide; for Poeſie is of ſo large an extent, and ſo many both of the Ancients and Moderns have done well in all kinds of it, that in citing one againſt the other, we ſhall take up more time this Evening, than each Man's occaſions will allow him: therefore I would ask *Crites* to what part of Poeſie he would confine his Arguments, and whether he would defend the general cauſe of the Ancients againſt the Moderns, or oppoſe any Age of the Moderns againſt this of ours.

Crites a little while conſidering upon this Demand, told *Eugenius* that if he pleaſed, he would limit their Diſpute to *Dramatick Poeſie*; in which he thought it not difficult to prove, either that the Ancients were ſuperiour to the Moderns, or the laſt Age to this of ours.

Eugenius was ſomewhat ſurpriz'd, when he heard *Crites* make choice of that Subject; for ought I ſee, ſaid he, I have undertaken a harder Province than I imagin'd; for though I never judg'd the Plays of the

Greek

Greek or *Roman* Poets comparable to ours; yet on the other ſide, thoſe we now ſee acted, come ſhort of many which were written in the laſt Age: but my comfort is, if we are o'ercome, it will be only by our own Country-men: and if we yield to them in this one part of Poeſie, we more ſurpaſs them in all the other; for in the Epique or Lyrick way it will be hard for them to ſhew us one ſuch amongſt them, as we have many now living, or who lately were. They can produce nothing ſo courtly writ, or which expreſſes ſo much the Converſation of a Gentleman, as Sir *John Suckling*; nothing ſo even, ſweet, and flowing as Mr. *Waller*: nothing ſo Majeſtick, ſo corrrect, as Sir *John Denham*; nothing ſo elevated, ſo copious, and full of Spirit, as Mr. *Cowley*: as for the *Italian*, *French*, and *Spaniſh* Plays, I can make it evident, that thoſe who now write, ſurpaſs them; and that the *Drama* is wholly ours.

All of them were thus far of *Eugenius* his Opinion, that the ſweetneſs of *Engliſh* Verſe was never underſtood or practis'd by our Fathers; even *Crites* himſelf did not much oppoſe it: and every one was willing to acknowledge how much our Poeſie is improv'd, by the happineſs of ſome Writers yet living; who firſt taught us to mould our thoughts into eaſie and ſignificant words; to retrench the ſuperfluities of expreſſion, and to make our Rhyme ſo properly a part of the Verſe, that it ſhould never miſ-lead the ſence, but it ſelf be led and govern'd by it.

Eugenius was going to continue this Diſcourſe, when *Liſideius* told him that it was neceſſary, before they proceeded further, to take a ſtanding meaſure of their Controverſie; for how was it poſſible to be decided who writ the beſt Plays, before we know what a Play ſhould be? but, this once agreed on by both Parties, each might have recourſe to it, either to prove his own advantages, or to diſcover the failings of his Adverſary.

He had no ſooner ſaid this, but all deſir'd the favour of him to give the definition of a Play; and they were the more importunate, becauſe neither *Ariſtotle*, nor *Horace*, nor any other, who had writ of that Subject, had ever done it.

Liſideius, after ſome modeſt Denials, at laſt confeſs'd he had a rude Notion of it; indeed rather a Deſcription than a Definition: but which ſerv'd to guide him in his private thoughts, when he was to make a Judgment of what others writ: That he conceiv'd a Play ought to be, *A juſt and lively Image of Humane Nature, repreſenting its Paſſions and Humours, and the Changes of Fortune to which it is ſubject; for the Delight and Inſtruction of Mankind.*

This Definition, though *Crites* rais'd a Logical Objection againſt it; that it was only *à genere & fine*, and ſo not altogether perfect; was yet well received by the reſt: and after they had given order to the Water-men to turn their Barge, and row ſoftly, that they might take the cool of the Evening in their return; *Crites*, being deſired by the Company to begin, ſpoke on behalf of the Ancients, in this manner.

If

If Confidence preſage a Victory, *Eugenius*, in his own Opinion, has already triumphed over the Ancients; nothing ſeems more eaſie to him, than to overcome thoſe whom it is our greateſt Praiſe to have imitated well: for we do not only build upon their foundations; but by their Models. *Dramatique Poeſie* had time enough reckoning from *Theſpis* (who firſt invented it) to *Ariſtophanes*, to be born, to grow up, and to flouriſh in Maturity. It has been obſerved of Arts and Sciences, that in one and the ſame Century they have arriv'd to great Perfection; and no wonder, ſince every Age has a kind of Univerſal Genius, which inclines thoſe that live in it to ſome particular Studies: the Work then being puſh'd on by many hands, muſt of neceſſity go forward.

Is it not evident, in theſe laſt hundred years (when the Study of Philoſophy has been the buſineſs of all the *Virtuoſi* in *Chriſtendome*) that almoſt a New Nature has been reveal'd to us? that more Errors of the School have been detected, more uſeful Experiments in Philoſophy have been made, more Noble Secrets in Opticks, Medicine, Anatomy, Aſtronomy, diſcover'd, than in all thoſe credulous and doting Ages from *Ariſtotle* to us? So true it is, that nothing ſpreads more faſt than Science, when rightly and generally cultivated.

Add to this, the more than common Emulation that was in thoſe times of writing well; which though it be found in all Ages and all Perſons that pretend to the ſame Reputation; yet Poeſie being then in more Eſteem than now it is, had greater Honours decreed to the Profeſſours of it; and conſequently the Rival-ſhip was more high between them; they had Judges ordain'd to decide their Merit, and Prizes to reward it: and Hiſtorians have been diligent to record of *Eſchylus*, *Euripides*, *Sophocles*, *Lycophron*, and the reſt of them, both who they were that vanquiſh'd in theſe Wars of the Theater, and how often they were crown'd: while the *Aſian* Kings and *Grecian* Common-wealths ſcarce afforded them a Nobler Subject than the unmanly Luxuries of a Debauch'd Court, or giddy Intrigues of a Factious City. *Alit æmulatio ingenia* (ſaith *Paterculus*) *& nunc invidia, nunc admiratio imitationem accendit:* Emulation is the Spur of Wit, and ſometimes Envy, ſometimes Admiration quickens our Endeavours.

But now ſince the Rewards of Honour are taken away, that vertuous Emulation is turn'd into direct Malice; yet ſo ſlothful, that it contents it ſelf to condemn and cry down others, without attempting to do better: 'Tis a Reputation too unprofitable, to take the neceſſary pains for it; yet wiſhing they had it, that deſire is incitement enough to hinder others from it. And this, in ſhort, *Eugenius*, is the reaſon, why you have now ſo few good Poets; and ſo many ſevere Judges: Certainly, to imitate the Ancients well, much Labour and long Study is required: which pains, I have already ſhewn, our Poets would want incouragement to take, if yet they had Ability to go through the Work. Thoſe Ancients have been faithful Imitators, and wiſe Obſervers of that Nature

ture which is ſo torn and ill repreſented in our Plays; they have handed down to us a perfect Reſemblance of her; which we, like ill Copyers, neglecting to look on, have rendred monſtrous, and disfigur'd. But, that you may know how much you are indebted to thoſe your Maſters, and be aſhamed to have ſo ill requited them: I muſt remember you, that all the Rules by which we practiſe the *Drama* at this day, (either ſuch as relate to the Juſtneſs and Symmetry of the Plot; or the Epiſodical Ornaments, ſuch as Deſcriptions, Narrations, and other Beauties, which are not eſſential to the Play;) were delivered to us from the Obſervations which *Ariſtotle* made, of thoſe Poets, who either liv'd before him, or were his Contemporaries: we have added nothing of our own, except we have the Confidence to ſay our Wit is better; Of which none boaſt in this our Age, but ſuch as underſtand not theirs. Of that Book which *Ariſtotle* has left us, περὶ ὁ Ποιητικῆς *Horace* his Art of Poetry is an excellent Comment, and, I believe, reſtores to us that ſecond Book of his concerning Comedy, which is wanting in him.

Out of theſe two have been extracted the Famous Rules which the *French* call, *Des Trois Unitez*, or, The Three Unities, which ought to be obſerv'd in every regular Play; namely, of Time, Place, and Action.

The Unity of Time they comprehend in 24 hours, the compaſs of a Natural Day; or as near it as can be contriv'd: and the reaſon of it is obvious to every one, that the time of the feigned Action, or Fable of the Play, ſhould be proportion'd as near as can be to the duration of that time in which it is repreſented; ſince therefore all Plays are Acted on the Theater in a ſpace of time much within the compaſs of 24 hours, that Play is to be thought the neareſt Imitation of Nature, whoſe Plot or Action is confin'd within that time; and, by the ſame Rule which concludes this general proportion of time, it follows, that all the parts of it are (as near as may be) to be equally ſub-divided; namely, that one Act take not up the ſuppos'd time of half a day; which is out of proportion to the reſt: ſince the other four are then to be ſtraightned with the compaſs of the remaining half; for it is unnatural, that one Act, which being ſpoke or written, is not longer than the reſt, ſhould be ſuppos'd longer by the Audience; 'tis therefore the Poet's Duty, to take care that no Act ſhould be imagin'd to exceed the time in which it is repreſented on the Stage; and that the Intervals and Inequalities of time be ſuppos'd to fall out between the Acts.

This Rule of Time how well it has been obſerv'd by the Ancients, moſt of their Plays will witneſs; you ſee them in their Tragedies (wherein to follow this Rule, is certainly moſt difficult) from the very beginning of their Plays, falling cloſe into that part of the Story which they intend for the Action or principal Object of it: leaving the former part to be delivered by Narration: ſo that they ſet the Audience, as it were, at the Poſt where the Race is to be concluded: and, ſaving

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them the tedious expectation of ſeeing the Poet ſet out and ride the beginning of the Courſe, they ſuffer you not to behold him, till he is in ſight of the Goal, and juſt upon you.

For the Second Unity, which is that of Place, the Antients meant by it, That the Scene ought to be continued through the Play, in the ſame place where it was laid in the beginning: for the Stage, on which it is repreſented, being but one and the ſame place, it is unnatural to conceive it many; and thoſe far diſtant from one another. I will not deny, but by the variation of painted Scenes, the Fancy (which in theſe caſes will contribute to its own Deceit) may ſometimes imagine it ſeveral Places, with ſome Appearance of Probability; yet it ſtill carries the greater likelihood of Truth, if thoſe places be ſuppos'd ſo near each other, as in the ſame Town or City, which may all be comprehended under the larger Denomination of one Place: for a greater diſtance will bear no proportion to the ſhortneſs of time, which is alloted in the Acting, to paſs from one of them to another; for the Obſervation of this, next to the Ancients, the *French* are to be moſt commended. They tye themſelves ſo ſtrictly to the Unity of Place, that you never ſee in any of their Plays, a Scene chang'd in the middle of an Act: if the Act begins in a Garden, a Street, or Chamber, 'tis ended in the ſame place; and that you may know it to be the ſame, the Stage is ſo ſupplied with Perſons, that it is never empty all the time: he who enters ſecond has buſineſs with him who was on before; and before the ſecond quits the Stage, a third appears who has buſineſs with him.

This *Corneille* calls *La Liaiſon des Scenes*, the continuity or joyning of the Scenes; and 'tis a good mark of a well contriv'd Play when all the Perſons are known to each other, and every one of them has ſome Affairs with all the reſt.

As for the third Unity, which is that of Action, the Ancients meant no other by it than what the Logicians do by their *Finis*, the End or Scope of any Action: that which is the firſt in Intention, and laſt in Execution: now the Poet is to aim at one great and compleat Action, to the carrying on of which all things in his Play, even the very Obſtacles, are to be ſubſervient; and the reaſon of this is as evident as any of the former.

For two Actions equally labour'd and driven on by the Writer, would deſtroy the Unity of the Poem; it would be no longer one Play, but two: not but that there may be many Actions in a Play, as *Ben. Johnſon* has obſerv'd in his Diſcoveries; but they muſt be all ſubſervient to the great one, which our Language happily expreſſes in the name of Under-plots: ſuch as in *Terence*'s *Eunuch* is the difference and reconcilement of *Thais* and *Phædria*, which is not the chief Buſineſs of the Play, but promotes the Marriage of *Chærea* and *Chremes*'s Siſter, principally intended by the Poet. There ought to be but one Action, ſays *Corneille*, that is, one compleat Action which leaves the Mind of the Audience

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In a full repoſe: but this cannot be brought to paſs, but by many other imperfect Actions which conduce to it, and hold the Audience in a delightful ſuſpence of what will be.

If by theſe Rules (to omit many other drawn from the Precepts and Practice of the Ancients) we ſhould judge our modern Plays; 'tis probable, that few of them would endure the Tryal: that which ſhould be the buſineſs of a day, takes up in ſome of them an Age; inſtead of one Action they are the Epitomes of a Man's Life; and for one ſpot of ground (which the Stage ſhould repreſent) we are ſometimes in more Countries than the Map can ſhew us.

But if we will allow the Ancients to have contriv'd well, we muſt acknowledge them to have written better; queſtionleſs we are deprived of a great ſtock of Wit in the loſs of *Menander* amongſt the *Greek* Poets, and of *Cæcilius*, *Affranius*, and *Varius* among the *Romans*: we may gueſs at *Menander*'s Excellency, by the Plays of *Terence*, who tranſlated ſome of them: and yet wanted ſo much of him, that he was called by *C. Cæſar* the Half-*Menander*; and may judge of *Varius*, by the Teſtimonies of *Horace*, *Martial*, and *Velleius Paterculus*: 'Tis probable that theſe, could they be recover'd, would decide the Controverſie; but ſo long as *Ariſtophanes* and *Plautus* are extant; while the Tragedies of *Euripides*, *Sophocles*, and *Seneca* are in our hands, I can never ſee one of thoſe Plays which are now written, but it encreaſes my admiration of the Ancients; and yet I muſt acknowledge further, that to admire them as we ought, we ſhould underſtand them better than we do. Doubtleſs many things appear flat to us, the Wit of which depended on ſome Cuſtom or Story which never came to our Knowledge, or perhaps on ſome Criticiſm in their Language, which being ſo long dead, and only remaining in their Books, 'tis not poſſible they ſhould make us underſtand perfectly. To read *Macrobius*, explaining the Propriety and Elegancy of many words in *Virgil*, which I had before paſs'd over without conſideration, as common things, is enough to aſſure me that I ought to think the ſame of *Terence*; and that in the purity of his Style (which *Tully* ſo much valued, that he ever carried his Works about him) there is yet left in him great room for Admiration, if I knew but where to place it. In the mean time, I muſt deſire you to take notice, that the greateſt Man of the laſt Age (*Ben. Johnſon*) was willing to give place to them in all things: He was not only a profeſs'd Imitatour of *Horace*, but a learned Plagiary of all the others; you track him every where in their Snow: If *Horace*, *Lucan*, *Petronius Arbiter*, *Seneca*, and *Juvenal*, had their own from him, there are few ſerious thoughts which are new in him; you will pardon me therefore if I preſume he lov'd their Faſhion when he wore their Clothes. But ſince I have otherwiſe a great Veneration for him, and you, *Eugenius*, prefer him above all other Poets, I will uſe no farther Arguments to you than his Example: I will produce before you Father *Ben.* dreſs'd in all the Ornaments and Colours of the Ancients, you will need no other Guide to our Party if you fol-

low him; and whether you conſider the bad Plays of our Age, or regard the good Plays of the laſt, both the beſt and worſt of the modern Poets will equally inſtruct you to admire the Ancients.

Crites had no ſooner left ſpeaking, but *Eugenius*, who had waited with ſome Impatience for it, thus began:

I have obſerv'd in your Speech, that the former part of it is convincing, as to what the Moderns have profited by the Rules of the Ancients; but in the latter you are careful to conceal how much they have excell'd them: we own all the Helps we have from them, and want neither Veneration nor Gratitude while we acknowledge, that to overcome them we muſt make uſe of the Advantages we have received from them; but to theſe Aſſiſtances we have join'd our own Induſtry; for (had we ſate down with a dull Imitation of them) we might then have loſt ſomewhat of the old Perfection, but never acquir'd any that was new. We draw not therefore after their Lines, but thoſe of Nature; and having the Life before us, beſides the Experience of all they knew, it is no wonder if we hit ſome Airs and Features which they have miſs'd; I deny not what you urge of Arts and Sciences, that they have flouriſhed in ſome Ages more than others; but your Inſtance in Philoſophy makes for me: for if Natural Cauſes be more known now than in the time of *Ariſtotle*, becauſe more ſtudied, it follows, that Poeſie and other Arts may with the ſame pains arrive ſtill nearer to Perfection, and, that granted, it will reſt for you to prove, that they wrought more perfect Images of Humane Life, than we; which, ſeeing in your Diſcourſe you have avoided to make good, it ſhall now be my task to ſhew you ſome part of their defects, and ſome few Excellencies of the Moderns; and I think there is none among us can imagine I do it enviouſly, or with purpoſe to detract from them; for what Intereſt of Fame or Profit can the living loſe by the reputation of the dead? on the other ſide, it is a great Truth which *Velleius Paterculus* affirms, *Audita viſis libentius laudamus; & præſentia invidiâ, præterita admiratione proſequimur; & his nos obrui, illis inſtrui credimus:* That Praiſe or Cenſure is certainly the moſt ſincere which unbrib'd Poſterity ſhall give us.

Be pleaſed then, in the firſt place, to take notice, that the *Greek* Poeſie, which *Crites* has affirm'd to have arriv'd to perfection in the Reign of the old Comedy, was ſo far from it, that the diſtinction of it into Acts was not known to them; or if it were, it is yet ſo darkly deliver'd to us, that we cannot make it out.

All we know of it is from the ſinging of their Chorus, and that too is ſo uncertain, that in ſome of their Plays we have reaſon to conjecture they ſung more than five times: *Ariſtotle* indeed divides the Integral parts of a Play into four: Firſt, the *Protaſis*, or Entrance, which gives light only to the Characters of the Perſons, and proceeds very little into any part of the Action: Secondly, the *Epitaſis*, or working up of the Plot where the Play grows warmer: the Deſign or Action of it is drawing

ing on, and you ſee ſomething promiſing that it will come to paſs: Thirdly, the *Cataſtaſis*, call'd by the *Romans*, *Status*, the Heighth, and full Growth of the Play: we may call it properly the Counter-turn, which deſtroys that Expectation, imbroils the Action in new difficulties, and leaves you far diſtant from that hope in which it found you, as you may have obſerv'd in a violent ſtream, reſiſted by a narrow paſſage; it runs round to an Eddy, and carries back the Waters with more ſwiftneſs than it brought them on: Laſtly, the *Cataſtrophe*, which the *Grecians* call'd λύσις, the *French*, *le denouement*, and we, the diſcovery or unravelling of the Plot: there you ſee all things ſetling again upon their firſt Foundations, and the Obſtacles which hindred the Deſign or Action of the Play once remov'd, it ends with that reſemblance of Truth and Nature, that the Audience are ſatisfied with the Conduct of it. Thus this great Man deliver'd to us the Image of a Play, and I muſt confeſs it is ſo lively, that from thence much light has been deriv'd to the forming it more perfectly into Acts and Scenes; but what Poet firſt limited to five the number of the Acts I know not; only we ſee it ſo firmly eſtabliſh'd in the time of *Horace*, that he gives it for a Rule in Comedy; *Neu brevior quinto, neu ſit productior actu:* So that you ſee the *Grecians* cannot be ſaid to have conſummated this Art; writing rather by Entrances, than by Acts, and having rather a general indigeſted Notion of a Play, than knowing how and where to beſtow the particular Graces of it.

But ſince the *Spaniards* at this day allow but three Acts, which they call *Jornadas*, to a Play; and the *Italians* in many of theirs follow them, when I condemn the Ancients, I declare it is not altogether becauſe they have not five Acts to every Play, but becauſe they have not confin'd themſelves to one certain Number; 'tis building an Houſe without a Model: and when they ſucceeded in ſuch Undertakings, they ought to have ſacrific'd to Fortune, not to the Muſes.

Next, for the Plot, which *Ariſtotle* call'd τὸ μυθὸς, and often τῶν πραγμάτων σύνθεσις, and from him the *Romans Fabula*, it has already been judiciouſly obſerv'd by a late Writer, that in their Tragedies it was only ſome Tale deriv'd from *Thebes* or *Troy*, or at leaſt ſome thing that happen'd in thoſe two Ages; which was worn ſo thred-bare by the Pens of all the Epique Poets, and even by Tradition it ſelf of the Talkative *Greeklings* (as *Ben. Johnſon* calls them) that before it came upon the Stage, it was already known to all the Audience; and the People, ſo ſoon as ever they heard the Name of *Oedipus*, knew as well as the Poet, that he had kill'd his Father by a miſtake, and committed Inceſt with his Mother before the Play; that they were now to hear of a great Plague, an Oracle, and the Ghoſt of *Laius:* ſo that they ſate with a yawning kind of expectation, till he was to come with his Eyes pull'd out, and ſpeak a hundred or more Verſes in a Tragick Tone, in complaint of his Misfortunes. But one *Oedipus*, *Hercules*, or *Medea*, had been tolerable; poor People they ſcap'd not ſo good cheap: they

had ſtill the *Chapon Bouillé* ſet before them, till their appetites were cloy'd with the ſame diſh, and the Novelty being gone, the pleaſure vaniſh'd: ſo that one main end of *Dramatique Poeſie* in its Definition, which was to cauſe Delight, was of conſequence deſtroy'd.

In their Comedies, The Romans generally borrow'd their Plots from the Greek Poets; and theirs was commonly a little Girl ſtollen or wandred from her Parents, brought back unknown to the City, there got with child by ſome lewd young fellow; who, by the help of his ſervant, cheats his father, and when her time comes, to cry *Juno Lucina fer opem*; one or other ſees a little Box or Cabinet which was carried away with her, and ſo diſcovers her to her friends, if ſome God do not prevent it, by coming down in a Machine, and taking the thanks of it to himſelf.

By the Plot you may gueſs much of the Characters of the Perſons. An Old Father who would willingly before he dies, ſee his Son well married; his Debauch'd Son, kind in his Nature to his Miſtreſs, but miſerably in want of Money; a Servant or Slave, who has ſo much Wit to ſtrike in with him, and help to dupe his Father, a Braggadochio Captain, a Paraſite, and a Lady of Pleaſure.

As for the poor honeſt Maid, on whom the Story is built, and who ought to be one of the principal Actors in the Play, ſhe is commonly a Mute in it: She has the breeding of the Old *Elizabeth* way, which was for Maids to be ſeen and not to be heard; and it is enough you know ſhe is willing to be married, when the Fifth Act requires it.

Theſe are Plots built after the Italian Mode of Houſes, you ſee through them all at once; the Characters are indeed the Imitations of Nature, but ſo narrow as if they had imitated only an Eye or an Hand, and did not dare to venture on the lines of a Face, or the proportion of a Body.

But in how ſtraight a compaſs ſoever they have bounded their Plots and Characters, we will paſs it by, if they have regularly purſued them, and perfectly obſerv'd thoſe three Unities of Time, Place, and Action: the knowledge of which you ſay is deriv'd to us from them. But in the firſt place give me leave to tell you, that the Unity of Place, however it might be practiſed by them, was never any of their Rules: We neither find it in *Ariſtotle*, *Horace*, or any who have written of it, till in our Age the French Poets firſt made it a Precept of the Stage. The Unity of Time, even *Terence* himſelf (who was the beſt and moſt regular of them) has neglected: His *Heautontimoroumenos* or Self-puniſher takes up viſibly two days; ſays *Scaliger*, the two firſt Acts concluding the firſt day, the three laſt the day enſuing; and *Euripides*, in tying himſelf to one day, has committed an abſurdity never to be forgiven him: for in one of his Tragedies he has made *Theſeus* go from *Athens* to *Thebes*, which was about 40 Engliſh miles, under the walls of it to give battel, and appear victorious in the next Act; and yet from the time of his departure to the return of the *Nuntius*, who gives the relation of his Victory, *Æthra* and the Chorus have but 36 Verſes; which is not for every Mile a Verſe.

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The like errour is as evident in *Terence* his Eunuch, when *Laches*, the old man, enters by miſtake into the houſe of *Thais*, where betwixt his Exit and the entrance of *Pythias*, who comes to give ample relation of the diſorders he has rais'd within, *Parmeno* who was left upon the Stage, has not above five lines to ſpeak: *C'eſt bien employer un temps ſi court*, ſays the French Poet, who furniſh'd me with one of the obſervations: And almoſt all their Tragedies will afford us examples of the like nature.

'Tis true, they have kept the continuity, or as you call'd it, *Liaiſon des Scenes* ſomewhat better: two do not perpetually come in together, talk, and go out together; and other two ſucceed them, and do the ſame throughout the Act, which the Engliſh call by the name of ſingle Scenes; but the reaſon is, becauſe they have ſeldom above two or three Scenes, properly ſo call'd, in every Act; for it is to be accounted a new Scene, not only every time the Stage is empty, but every perſon who enters, tho' to others, makes it ſo; becauſe he introduces a new buſineſs: Now the Plots of their Plays being narrow, and the perſons few, one of their Acts was written in a leſs compaſs than one of our well-wrought Scenes, and yet they are often deficient even in this: To go no further than *Terence*, you find in the Eunuch *Antipho* entring ſingle in the midſt of the third Act, after *Chremes* and *Pythias* were gone off: In the ſame Play you have likewiſe *Dorias* beginning the fourth Act alone; and after ſhe has made a relation of what was done at the Soldiers entertainment (which by the way was very inartificial) becauſe ſhe was preſum'd to ſpeak directly to the Audience, and to acquaint them with what was neceſſary to be known, but yet ſhould have been ſo contriv'd by the Poet as to have been told by perſons of the *Drama* to one another, (and ſo by them to have come to the knowledge of the people) ſhe quits the Stage, and *Phædria* enters next, alone likewiſe: He alſo gives you an account of himſelf, and of his returning from the Country in *Monologue*, to which unnatural way of narration *Terence* is ſubject in all his Plays: In his *Adelphi* or Brothers, *Syrus* and *Demea* enter; after the Scene was broken by the departure of *Soſtrata*, *Geta* and *Canthara*; and indeed you can ſcarce look into any of his Comedies, where you will not preſently diſcover the ſame interruption.

But as they have fail'd both in laying of their Plots, and in the management, ſwerving from the Rules of their own Art, by miſ-repreſenting Nature to us, in which they have ill ſatisfied one intention of a Play, which was delight, ſo in the inſtructive part they have err'd worſe: inſtead of puniſhing Vice, and rewarding Vertue, they have often ſhewn a Proſperous Wickedneſs, and an Unhappy Piety: They have ſet before us a bloody image of revenge in *Medea*, and given her Dragons to convey her ſafe from puniſhment. A *Priam* and *Aſtyanax* murder'd, and *Caſſandra* raviſh'd, and the Luſt and Murder ending in the victory of him who acted them: In ſhort, there is no indecorum in any of our modern Plays, which if I would excuſe, I could not ſhadow with ſome Authority from the Ancients.

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And one farther Note of them let me leave you: Tragedies and Comedies were not writ then as they are now, promiscuously, by the same person; but he who found his genius bending to the one, never attempted the other way. This is so plain, that I need not instance to you, that *Aristophanes*, *Plautus*, *Terence*, never any of them writ a Tragedy; *Æschylus*, *Euripides*, *Sophocles* and *Seneca*, never medled with Comedy: the Sock and Buskin were not worn by the same Poet: having then so much care to excel in one kind, very little is to be pardon'd them if they miscarried in it; and this would lead me to the consideration of their Wit, had not *Crites* given me sufficient warning not to be too bold in my judgment of it; because the Languages being dead, and many of the Customs, and little accidents on which it depended, lost to us, we are not competent Judges of it. But tho' I grant, that here and there we may miss the application of a Proverb or a Custom, yet a thing well said will be Wit in all Languages; and tho' it may lose something in the Translation, yet to him who reads it in the Original, 'tis still the same; He has an Idea of its excellency, tho' it cannot pass from his mind into any other expression or words than those in which he finds it. When *Phædria* in the Eunuch had a command from his Mistress to be absent two days, and encouraging himself to go through with it, said, *Tandem ego non illâ caream, si opus sit, vel totum triduum? Parmeno*, to mock the softness of his Master, lifting up his hands and eyes, cries out as it were in admiration, *Hui! universum triduum!* the elegancy of which *universum*, tho' it cannot be rendred in our Language, yet leaves an impression on our Souls: but this happens seldom in him, in *Plautus* oftner; who is infinitely too bold in his Metaphors and coyning words; out of which many times his Wit is nothing, which questionless was one reason why *Horace* falls upon him so severely in those Verses:

Sed Proavi nostri Plautinos & numeros, &
Laudavere sales, nimium patienter utrumque,
Ne dicam stolidè.

For *Horace* himself was cautious to obtrude a new word on his Readers, and makes custom and common use the best measure of receiving it into our Writings.

Multa renascentur quæ nunc cecidere, cadentq;
Quæ nunc sunt in honore vocabula, si volet usus,
Quem penes, arbitrium est, & jus, & norma loquendi.

The not observing this Rule is that which the World has blam'd in our Satyrist *Cleveland*; to express a thing hard and unnaturally, is his new way of Elocution: 'Tis true, no Poet but may sometimes use a *Catachresis*; *Virgil* does it,

Mistaque ridenti Colocasia fundet Acantho.

In

In his Eclogue of *Pollio*, and in his 7th *Æneid*,

Mirantur & undæ,
Miratur nemus, inſuetum fulgentia longe,
Scuta virum fluvio, pictaſq; innare carinas.

And *Ovid* once ſo modeſtly, that he asks leave to do it,

Si verbo audacia detur,
Haud metuam ſummi dixiſſe Palatia cœli.

Calling the Court of *Jupiter* by the name of *Auguſtus* his Pallace, tho' in another place he is more bold, where he ſays, *Et longas viſent Capitolia pompas.* But to do this always, and never be able to write a line without it, tho' it may be admir'd by ſome few Pedants, will not paſs upon thoſe who know that Wit is beſt convey'd to us in the moſt eaſie language; and is moſt to be admir'd when a great thought comes dreſt in words ſo commonly receiv'd, that it is underſtood by the meaneſt apprehenſions, as the beſt Meat is the moſt eaſily digeſted: but we cannot read a Verſe of *Cleveland*'s without making a face at it, as if every word were a Pill to ſwallow: he gives us many times a hard Nut to break our Teeth, without a Kernel for our pains. So that there is this difference betwixt his *Satyrs* and Doctor *Donn*'s, That the one gives us deep thoughts in common language, tho' rough cadence; the other gives us common thoughts in abſtruſe words: 'tis true, in ſome places his Wit is independent of his Words, as in that of the Rebel *Scot*:

Had Cain *been* Scot, *God would have chang'd his doom;*
Not forc'd him wander, but confin'd him home.

Si ſic, omnia dixiſſet! This is Wit in all Languages: 'tis like Mercury, never to be loſt or kill'd: And ſo that other,

For Beauty, like White-Powder, makes no noiſe,
And yet the ſilent Hypocrite deſtroys.

You ſee the laſt line is highly Metaphorical, but it is ſo ſoft and gentle that it does not ſhock us as we read it.

But, to return from whence I have digreſs'd, to the conſideration of the Ancients Writing and their Wit, (of which, by this time, you will grant us in ſome meaſure to be fit Judges,) Tho' I ſee many excellent thoughts in *Seneca*, yet he, of them who had a Genius moſt proper for the Stage, was *Ovid*; he had a way of writing ſo fit to ſtir up a pleaſing admiration and concernment, which are the objects of a Tragedy,

gedy, and to ſhew the various movements of a Soul combating betwixt two different Paſſions; that had he liv'd in our Age, or in his own, could have writ with our Advantages, no Man but muſt have yielded to him; and therefore I am confident the *Medea* is none of his; for though I eſteem it for the Gravity and Sententiouſneſs of it, which he himſelf concludes to be ſuitable to a Tragedy, *Omne genus ſcripti gravitate Tragœdia vincit*, yet it moves not my Soul enough to judge that he, who in the Epique way wrote things ſo near the *Drama*, as the Story of *Myrrha*, of *Caunus* and *Biblis*, and the reſt, ſhould ſtir up no more concernment where he moſt endeavour'd it. The Maſter-piece of *Seneca* I hold to be that Scene in the *Troades*, where *Ulyſſes* is ſeeking for *Aſtyanax* to kill him; There you ſee the Tenderneſs of a Mother, ſo repreſented in *Andromache*, that it raiſes compaſſion to a high degree in the Reader, and bears the neareſt reſemblance of any thing in the Tragedies of the Ancients, to the excellent Scenes of Paſſion in *Shakeſpear*, or in *Fletcher*; for Love-Scenes you will find few among them, their Tragick Poets dealt not with that ſoft Paſſion, but with Luſt, Cruelty, Revenge, Ambition, and thoſe bloody Actions they produc'd; which were more capable of raiſing Horrour than Compaſſion in an Audience: leaving Love untouch'd, whoſe Gentleneſs would have temper'd them, which is the moſt frequent of all the Paſſions, and which being the private concernment of every Perſon, is ſooth'd by viewing its own Image in a publick Entertainment.

Among their Comedies, we find a Scene or two of Tenderneſs, and that where you would leaſt expect it, in *Plautus*; but to ſpeak generally, their Lovers ſays little, when they ſee each other, but *anima mea, vita mea*; ζωὴ καὶ ψυχή, as the Women in *Juvenal*'s time us'd to cry out in the fury of their Kindneſs: Any ſudden guſt of Paſſion (as an Ecſtaſie of Love in an unexpected meeting) cannot better be expreſs'd than in a word, and a ſigh, breaking one another. Nature is dumb on ſuch occaſions, and to make her ſpeak, would be to repreſent her unlike her ſelf. But there are a thouſand other concernments of Lovers, as Jealouſies, Complaints, Contrivances, and the like, where not to open their minds at large to each other, were to be wanting to their own Love, and to the expectation of the Audience; who watch the movements of their Minds, as much as the changes of their Fortunes. For the imagining of the firſt is properly the work of a Poet, the latter he borrows from the Hiſtorian.

Eugenius was proceeding in that part of his Diſcourſe, when *Crites* interrupted him. I ſee, ſaid he, *Eugenius* and I are never like to have this Queſtion decided betwixt us; for he maintains the Moderns have acquir'd a new Perfection in Writing, I can only grant they have alter'd the mode of it. *Homer* deſcrib'd his Heroes, Men of great Appetites, Lovers of Beef broil'd upon the coals, and good fellows; contrary to the practice of the *French* Romances, whoſe Heroes neither eat,

eat, nor drink, nor ſleep for love. *Virgil* makes *Æneas* a bold Avower of his own Virtues,

Sum pius Æneas famâ ſuper æthera notus;

which in the civility of our Poets is the Character of a Fanfaron or Hector: for with us the Knight takes occaſion to walk out, or ſleep, to avoid the vanity of telling his own Story, which the truſty Squire is ever to perform for him. So in their Love-Scenes, of which *Eugenius* ſpoke laſt, the Ancients were more hearty, we more talkative: they writ Love as it was then the Mode to make it, and I will grant this much to *Eugenius*, that perhaps one of their Poets, had he liv'd in our Age,

Si foret hoc noſtrum fato delapſus in ævum,

(as *Horace* ſays of *Lucilius*) he had alter'd many things; not that they were not natural before, but that he might accommodate himſelf to the Age in which he liv'd; yet in the mean time we are not to conclude any thing raſhly againſt thoſe great Men, but preſerve to them the Dignity of Maſters, and give that Honor to their Memories, (*Quos libitina ſacravit*;) part of which we expect may be paid to us in future times.

This Moderation of *Crites*, as it was pleaſing to all the Company, ſo it put an end to that Diſpute; which, *Eugenius*, who ſeem'd to have the better of the Argument, would urge no farther: but *Liſideius*, after he had acknowledg'd himſelf of *Eugenius* his Opinion, concerning the Ancients; yet told him he had forborn, till his Diſcourſe were ended, to ask him, why he prefer'd the *Engliſh* Plays above thoſe of other Nations? And whether we ought not to ſubmit our Stage to the Exactneſs of our next Neighbours?

Tho', ſaid *Eugenius*, I am at all times ready to defend the Honour of my Country againſt the *French*, and to maintain, we are as well able to vanquiſh them with our Pens as our Anceſtors have been with their Swords; yet, if you pleaſe, added he, looking upon *Neander*, I will commit this Cauſe to my Friend's management; his Opinion of our Plays is the ſame with mine: and beſides, there is no reaſon, that *Crites* and I, who have now left the Stage, ſhould re-enter ſo ſuddenly upon it; which is againſt the Laws of Comedy.

If the Queſtion had been ſtated, replied *Liſideius*, who had writ beſt, the *French* or *Engliſh* forty years ago, I ſhould have been of your Opinion, and adjudg'd the Honor to our own Nation; but ſince that time, (ſaid he, turning towards *Neander*) we have been ſo long together bad *Engliſhmen*, that we had not leiſure to be good Poets; *Beaumont*, *Fletcher*, and *Johnſon* (who were only capable of bringing us to that degree of Perfection which we have) were juſt then leaving the World; as if in an Age of ſo much Horrour, Wit and thoſe milder Studies of Humanity, had no farther buſineſs among us. But the Muſes, who ever

follow Peace, went to plant in another Countrey; it was then that the great Cardinal of *Richlieu* began to take them into his protection; and that, by his encouragement, *Corneille* and ſome other French-men reform'd their Theatre, (which before was as much below ours as it now ſurpaſſes it and the reſt of *Europe*;) but becauſe *Crites*, in his Diſcourſe for the Ancients, has prevented me, by obſerving many Rules of the Stage, which the Moderns have borrow'd from them; I ſhall only, in ſhort, demand of you, whether you are not convinc'd that of all Nations the French have beſt obſerv'd them? In the unity of time you find them ſo ſcrupulous, that it yet remains a diſpute among their Poets, whether the artificial day of twelve hours, more or leſs, be not meant by *Ariſtotle*, rather than the natural one of twenty four; and conſequently whether all Plays ought not to be reduc'd into that compaſs? This I can teſtifie, that in all their *Drama*'s writ within theſe laſt twenty Years and upwards, I have not obſerv'd any that have extended the time to thirty hours: in the unity of place they are full as ſcrupulous, for many of their Criticks limit it to that very ſpot of ground where the Play is ſuppos'd to begin; none of them exceed the compaſs of the ſame Town or City.

The unity of Action in all their Plays is yet more conſpicuous, for they do not burden them with Under-plots, as the Engliſh do; which is the reaſon why many Scenes of our Tragi-comedies carry on a deſign that is nothing of kin to the main Plot; and that we ſee two diſtinct Webs in a Play, like thoſe in ill-wrought Stuffs; and two Actions, that is, two Plays carried on together, to the confounding of the Audience; who, before they are warm in their concernments for one part, are diverted to another; and by that means eſpouſe the intereſt of neither. From hence likewiſe it ariſes, that the one half of our Actors are not known to the other. They keep their diſtances as if they were *Mountagues* and *Capulets*, and ſeldom begin an acquaintance till the laſt Scene of the Fifth Act, when they are all to meet upon the Stage. There is no Theatre in the World has any thing ſo abſurd as the Engliſh Tragi-comedy, 'tis a *Drama* of our own invention, and the faſhion of it is enough to proclaim it ſo; here a courſe of Mirth, there another of Sadneſs and paſſion, and a third of Honour and a Duel: Thus in two hours and a half we run through all the fits of *Bedlam*. The French afford you as much variety on the ſame day, but they do it not ſo unſeaſonably, or *mal à propos* as we: Our Poets preſent you the Play and the Farce together; and our Stages ſtill retain ſomewhat of the original civility of the Red-Bull;

Atque ursum & pugiles media inter carmina poſcunt.

The end of Tragedies or ſerious Plays, ſays *Ariſtotle*, is to beget admiration, compaſſion, or concernment; but are not mirth and compaſſion

paſſion things incompatible? and is it not evident, that the Poet muſt of neceſſity deſtroy the former by intermingling of the latter? that is, he muſt ruin the ſole end and object of his Tragedy to introduce ſomewhat that is forced in to it, and is not of the body of it: Would you not think that Phyſician mad, who having preſcribed a Purge, ſhould immediately order you to take Reſtringents?

But to leave our Plays, and return to theirs, I have noted one great advantage they have had in the Plotting of their Tragedies; that is, they are always grounded upon ſome known Hiſtory; according to that of *Horace*, *Ex noto fictum carmen ſequar*; and in that they have ſo imitated the Ancients, that they have ſurpaſs'd them. For the Ancients, as was obſerv'd before, took for the foundation of their Plays ſome Poetical Fiction, ſuch as under that conſideration could move but little concernment in the Audience, becauſe they already knew the event of it. But the French goes farther;

Atque ita mentitur; ſic veris falſa remiſcet,
Primo ne medium, medio ne diſcrepet imum.

He ſo interweaves Truth with probable Fiction, that he puts a pleaſing Fallacy upon us; mends the intrigues of Fate, and diſpenſes with the ſeverity of Hiſtory, to reward that Vertue which has been rendred to us there unfortunate. Sometimes the ſtory has left the ſucceſs ſo doubtful, that the Writer is free, by the priviledge of a Poet, to take that which of two or more relations will beſt ſute with his deſign: As for example, In the death of *Cyrus*, whom *Juſtin* and ſome others report to have periſh'd in the *Scythian* War, but *Xenophon* affirms to have died in his bed of extream old age. Nay more, when the event is paſt diſpute, even then we are willing to be deceiv'd, and the Poet, if he contrives it with appearance of truth, has all the audience of his Party; at leaſt during the time his Play is acting: ſo naturally we are kind to Vertue, when our own intereſt is not in queſtion, that we take it up as the general concernment of Mankind. On the other ſide, if you conſider the Hiſtorical Plays of *Shakeſpear*, they are rather ſo many Chronicles of Kings, or the buſineſs many times of thirty or forty Years, crampt into a repreſentation of two hours and a half, which is not to imitate or paint Nature, but rather to draw her in miniature, to take her in little; to look upon her through the wrong end of a Perſpective, and receive her Images not only much leſs, but infinitely more imperfect than the life: this, inſtead of making a Play delightful, renders it ridiculous.

Quodcunque oſtendis mihi ſic, incredulus odi.

For the Spirit of Man cannot be ſatisfied but with truth, or at leaſt

veriſimility; and a Poem is to contain, if not τὸ ἔντυμα, yet ἐντύμοισιν ὁμοῖα, as one of the Greek Poets has expreſs'd it.

Another thing in which the French differ from us and from the Spaniards, is, that they do not embaraſs or cumber themſelves with too much Plot: they only repreſent ſo much of a Story as will conſtitute one whole and great action ſufficient for a Play; we, who undertake more, do but multiply adventures; which, not being produc'd from one another, as effects from cauſes, but barely following, conſtitute many actions in the Drama, and conſequently make it many Plays.

But by purſuing cloſely one argument, which is not cloy'd with many turns, the French have gain'd more liberty for Verſe, in which they write: they have leiſure to dwell on a Subject which deſerves it; and to repreſent the Paſſions (which we have acknowledg'd to be the Poets work) without being hurried from one thing to another, as we are in the Plays of *Calderon*, which we have ſeen lately upon our Theaters, under the name of Spaniſh Plots. I have taken notice but of one Tragedy of ours, whoſe Plot has that uniformity and unity of deſign in it which I have commended in the French; and that is *Rollo*, or rather, under the name of *Rollo*, The Story of *Baſſianus* and *Geta* in *Herodian*; there indeed the Plot is neither large nor intricate, but juſt enough to fill the minds of the Audience, not to cloy them. Beſides, you ſee it founded upon the truth of Hiſtory, only the time of the action is not reduceable to the ſtrictneſs of the Rules; and you ſee in ſome places a little farce mingled, which is below the dignity of the other parts; and in this all our Poets are extreamly peccant, even *Ben. Johnſon* himſelf in *Sejanus* and *Cataline* has given us this Oleo of a Play: this unnatural mixture of Comedy and Tragedy, which to me ſounds juſt as ridiculouſly as the Hiſtory of *David* with the Merry Humours of *Goliah*'s. In *Sejanus* you may take notice of the Scene betwixt *Livia* and the Phyſician, which is a pleaſant Satyr upon the artificial helps of Beauty: In *Cataline* you may ſee the Parliament of Women; the little envies of them to one another; and all that paſſes betwixt *Curio* and *Fulvia*: Scenes admirable in their kind, but of an ill mingle with the reſt.

But I return again to the French Writers; who, as I have ſaid, do not burden themſelves too much with Plot, which has been reproach'd to them by an *ingenious perſon* of our Nation as a fault, for he ſays they commonly make but one perſon conſiderable in a Play; they dwell on him, and his concernments, while the reſt of the perſons are only ſubſervient to ſet him off. If he intends this by it, that there is one perſon in the Play who is of greater dignity than the reſt, he muſt tax, not only theirs, but thoſe of the Ancients, and which he would be loth to do, the beſt of ours; for 'tis impoſſible but that one perſon muſt be more conſpicuous in it than any other, and conſequently the greateſt ſhare in the action muſt devolve on him. We ſee it ſo in the management of all affairs; even in the moſt equal Ariſtocracy, the ballance can-

cannot be ſo juſtly pois'd, but ſome one will be ſuperiour to the reſt; either in parts, fortune, intereſt, or the conſideration of ſome glorious exploit; which will reduce the greateſt part of buſineſs into his hands.

But, if he would have us to imagine, that in exalting one character the reſt of them are neglected, and that all of them have not ſome ſhare or other in the action of the Play, I deſire him to produce any of *Corneille*'s Tragedies, wherein every perſon (like ſo many ſervants in a well-govern'd Family) has not ſome employment, and who is not neceſſary to the carrying on of the Plot, or at leaſt to your underſtanding it.

There are indeed ſome protatick perſons in the Ancients, whom they make uſe of in their Plays, either to hear, or give the Relation: but the French avoid this with great addreſs, making their Narrations only to, or by ſuch, who are ſome way intereſſed in the main deſign. And now I am ſpeaking of Relations, I cannot take a fitter opportunity to add this in favour of the French, that they often uſe them with better judgment and more *a propos* than the Engliſh do. Not that I commend Narrations in general, but there are two ſorts of them; one of thoſe things which are antecedent to the Play, and are related to make the conduct of it more clear to us, but, 'tis a fault to chuſe ſuch Subjects for the Stage as will force us on that Rock; becauſe we ſee they are ſeldom liſtned to by the Audience, and that is many times the ruin of the Play: for, being once let paſs without attention, the Audience can never recover themſelves to underſtand the Plot; and indeed it is ſomewhat unreaſonable, that they ſhould be put to ſo much trouble, as, that to comprehend what paſſes in their ſight, they muſt have recourſe to what was done, perhaps, ten or twenty Years ago.

But there is another ſort of Relations, that is, of things hapning in the Action of the Play, and ſuppos'd to be done behind the Scenes: and this is many times both convenient and beautiful: for, by it the French avoid the tumult, to which we are ſubject in *England*, by repreſenting Duels, Battels, and the like; which renders our Stage too like the Theaters where they fight Prizes. For what is more ridiculous than to repreſent an Army with a Drum and five Men behind it; all which, the Heroe of the other ſide is to drive in before him, or to ſee a Duel fought, and one ſlain with two or three thruſts of the Foyles, which we know are ſo blunted, that we might give a Man an hour to kill another in good earneſt with them.

I have obſerv'd, that in all our Tragedies the Audience cannot forbear laughing when the Actors are to die; 'tis the moſt Comick part of the whole Play. All *Paſſions* may be lively repreſented on the Stage, if to the well-writing of them the Actor ſupplies a good commanded Voice, and Limbs that move eaſily, and without ſtiffneſs; but there are many *Actions* which can never be imitated to a juſt heighth: dying eſpecially is a thing which none but a Roman Gladiator could naturally perform on the Stage when he did not imitate or repreſent, but do it; and therefore it is better to omit the repreſentation of it. The

The words of a good Writer which deſcribe it lively, will make a deeper impreſſion of belief in us than all the Actor can inſinuate into us, when he ſeems to fall dead before us; as a Poet in the deſcription of a beautiful Garden, or a Meadow, will pleaſe our imagination more than the place it ſelf can pleaſe our ſight. When we ſee death repreſented we are convinc'd it is but fiction; but when we hear it related, our eyes (the ſtrongeſt witneſſes) are wanting, which might have undeceiv'd us; and we are all willing to favour the ſleight when the Poet does not too groſly impoſe on us. They therefore who imagine theſe Relations would make no concernment in the Audience, are deceiv'd, by confounding them with the other, which are of things antecedent to the Play; thoſe are made often in cold blood (as I may ſay) to the Audience; but theſe are warm'd with our concernments, which were before awaken'd in the Play. What the Philoſophers ſay of Motion, that, when it is once begun, it continues of it ſelf, and will do ſo to Eternity without ſome ſtop put to it, is clearly true on this occaſion; the Soul being already mov'd with the Characters and Fortunes of thoſe imaginary perſons, continues going of its own accord, and we are no more weary to hear what becomes of them when they are not on the Stage, than we are to liſten to the News of an abſent Miſtreſs. But it is objected, That if one part of the Play may be related, then why not all? I anſwer, Some parts of the action are more fit to be repreſented, ſome to be related. *Corneille* ſays judiciouſly, that the Poet is not oblig'd to expoſe to view all particular actions which conduce to the principal: he ought to ſelect ſuch of them to be ſeen which will appear with the greateſt beauty, either by the magnificence of the ſhow, or the vehemence of paſſions which they produce, or ſome other charm which they have in them, and let the reſt arrive to the Audience by narration. 'Tis a great miſtake in us to believe the French preſent no part of the action on the Stage: every alteration or croſſing of a deſign, every new-ſprung paſſion, and turn of it, is a part of the action, and much the nobleſt, except we conceive nothing to be action till the Players come to blows; as if the painting of the Heroes mind were not more properly the Poets work than the ſtrength of his body. Nor does this any thing contradict the opinion of *Horace*, where he tells us,

Segnius irritant animos demiſſa per aurem,
Quam quæ ſunt oculis ſubjecta fidelibus.——

For he ſays immediately after,

——————— *Non tamen intus*
Digna geri promes in ſcenam, Multaq; tolles
Ex oculis, quæ mox narret facundia præſens.

Among

Among which many he recounts ſome.

Nec pueros coram populo Meded trucidet,
Aut in avem Progne mutetur, Cadmus in anguem, &c.

That is, thoſe actions which by reaſon of their cruelty will cauſe averſion in us, or by reaſon of their impoſſibility, unbelief, ought either wholly to be avoided by a Poet, or only deliver'd by narration. To which, we may have leave to add ſuch as to avoid tumult, (as was before hinted) or to reduce the Plot into a more reaſonable compaſs of time, or for defect of Beauty in them, are rather to be related than preſented to the Eye. Examples of all theſe kinds are frequent, not only among all the Ancients, but in the beſt receiv'd of our Engliſh Poets. We find *Ben. Johnſon* uſing them in his Magnetick Lady, where one comes out from Dinner, and relates the quarrels and diſorders of it to ſave the undecent appearance of them on the Stage, and to abbreviate the Story: and this in expreſs imitation of *Terence*, who had done the ſame before him in his Eunuch, where *Pythias* makes the like relation of what had happen'd within at the Soldiers entertainment. The relations likewiſe of *Sejanus*'s death, and the prodigies before it are remarkable; the one of which was hid from ſight to avoid the horror and tumult of the repreſentation; the other to ſhun the introducing of things impoſſible to be believ'd. In that excellent Play, *The King and no King*, *Fletcher* goes yet farther; for the whole unravelling of the Plot is done by narration in the fifth Act, after the manner of the Ancients; and it moves great concernment in the Audience, tho' it be only a relation of what was done many Years before the Play. I could multiply other inſtances, but theſe are ſufficient to prove, that there is no error in chuſing a Subject which requires this ſort of Narrations; in the ill management of them, there may.

But I find I have been too long in this Diſcourſe, ſince the French have many other excellencies not common to us; as that you never ſee any of their Plays end with a converſion, or ſimple change of will, which is the ordinary way which our Poets uſe to end theirs. It ſhews little art in the concluſion of a Dramatick Poem, when they who have hinder'd the felicity during the four Acts, deſiſt from it in the fifth, without ſome powerful cauſe to take them off their deſign; and tho' I deny not but ſuch reaſons may be found, yet it is a path that is cautiouſly to be trod, and the Poet is to be ſure he convinces the Audience, that the Motive is ſtrong enough. As for example, The converſion of the Uſurer in *The Scornful Lady*, ſeems to me a little forc'd; for being an Uſurer, which implies a lover of Money to the higheſt degree of covetouſneſs, (and ſuch the Poet has repreſented him) the account he gives for the ſudden change is, that he has been dup'd by the wild young fellow,

low, which in reaſon might render him more wary another time, and make him puniſh himſelf with harder fare and courſer cloaths to get up again what he had loſt: but that he ſhould look on it as a Judgment, and ſo repent, we may expect to hear in a Sermon, but I ſhould never indure it in a Play.

I paſs by this; neither will I inſiſt on the care they take, that no perſon after his firſt entrance ſhall ever appear, but the buſineſs which brings him upon the Stage ſhall be evident: which rule if obſerv'd, muſt needs render all the events in the Play more natural: for there you ſee the probability of every accident, in the cauſe that produc'd it; and that which appears chance in the Play, will ſeem ſo reaſonable to you, that you will there find it almoſt neceſſary; ſo that in the exit of the Actor you have a clear account of his purpoſe and deſign in the next entrance: (tho', if the Scene be well wrought, the event will commonly deceive you) for there is nothing ſo abſurd, ſays *Corneille*, as for an Actor to leave the Stage, only becauſe he has no more to ſay.

I ſhould now ſpeak of the beauty of their Rhime, and the juſt reaſon I have to prefer that way of writing in Tragedies before ours in Blank-Verſe; but becauſe it is partly receiv'd by us, and therefore not altogether peculiar to them, I will ſay no more of it in relation to their Plays. For our own, I doubt not but it will exceedingly beautifie them, and I can ſee but one reaſon why it ſhould not generally obtain, that is, becauſe our Poets write ſo ill in it. This indeed may prove a more prevailing argument than all others which are us'd to deſtroy it, and therefore I am only troubled when great and judicious Poets, and thoſe who are acknowledg'd ſuch, have writ or ſpoke againſt it; as for others, they are to be anſwer'd by that one Sentence of an ancient Author.

Sed ut primo ad conſequendos eos quos priores ducimus accendimur, ita ubi aut præteriri, aut æquari eos poſſe deſperavimus, ſtudium cum ſpe ſeneſcit: quod, ſcilicet, aſſequi non poteſt, ſequi deſinit; præteritoque eo in quo eminere non poſſumus, aliquid in quo nitamur conquirimus.

Liſideius concluded in this manner; and *Neander* after a little pauſe thus anſwer'd him.

I ſhall grant *Liſideius*, without much diſpute, a great part of what he has urg'd againſt us; for I acknowledge, that the French contrive their Plots more regularly, and obſerve the Laws of Comedy, and decorum of the Stage (to ſpeak generally) with more exactneſs than the Engliſh. Farther, I deny not but he has tax'd us juſtly in ſome irregularities of ours which he has mention'd; yet, after all, I am of opinion, that neither our Faults nor their Vertues are conſiderable enough to place them above us.

For the lively imitation of Nature being in the definition of a Play, thoſe which beſt fulfil that Law ought to be eſteem'd ſuperiour to the others. 'Tis true, thoſe beauties of the French-poeſie are ſuch as will raiſe perfection higher where it is, but are not ſufficient to give it where

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it is not: they are indeed the Beauties of a Statue, but not of a Man, becauſe not animated with the Soul of Poeſie, which is Imitation of Humour and Paſſions: and this *Liſideius* himſelf, or any other, however byaſſed to their Party, cannot but acknowlege, if he will either compare the Humours of our Comedies, or the Characters of our ſerious Plays with theirs. He who will look upon theirs which have been written till theſe laſt Ten years or thereabouts, will find it an hard matter to pick out two or three paſſable Humours amongſt them. *Corneille* himſelf, their Arch-Poet, what has he produc'd, except *The Lier*, and you know how it was cry'd up in *France*; but when it came upon the *Engliſh* Stage, though well tranſlated, and that part of *Dorant* acted ſo much Advantage as I am confident it never receiv'd in its own Countrey, the moſt favourable to it would not put it in competition with many of *Fletcher*'s or *Ben. Johnſon*'s. In the reſt of *Corneille*'s Comedies you have little Humour; he tells you himſelf his way is firſt to ſhew two Lovers in good Intelligence with each other; in the working up of the Play, to embroil them by ſome miſtake, and in the latter end to clear it, and reconcile them.

But of late years *Moliere*, the younger *Corneille*, *Quinault*, and ſome others, have been imitating afar off the quick Turns and Graces of the *Engliſh* Stage. They have mix'd their ſerious Plays with Mirth, like our Tragi-Comedies, ſince the Death of Cardinal *Richelieu*, which *Liſideius*, and many others not obſerving, have commended that in them for a Virtue which they themſelves no longer practiſe. Moſt of their new Plays are like ſome of ours, derived from the *Spaniſh* Novells. There is ſcarce one of them without a Veil, and a truſty *Diego*, who drolls much after the rate of the *Adventures*. But their Humours, if I may grace them with that name, are ſo thin ſown, that never above one of them comes up in any Play: I dare take upon me to find more variety of them in ſome one Play of *Ben. Johnſon*'s, than in all theirs together: as he who has ſeen the *Alchymiſt*, the *Silent Woman*, or *Bartholomew-Fair*, cannot but acknowledge with me.

I grant the *French* have performed what was poſſible on the ground-work of the *Spaniſh* Plays; what was pleaſant before, they have made regular; but there is not above one good Play to be writ on all thoſe Plots; they are too much alike to pleaſe often, which we need not the Experience of our own Stage to juſtifie. As for their new way of mingling Mirth with ſerious Plot, I do not, with *Liſideius*, condemn the thing, though I cannot approve their manner of doing it: He tells us, we cannot ſo ſpeedily recollect our ſelves after a Scene of great Paſſion and Concernment, as to paſs to another of Mirth and Humour, and to enjoy it with any reliſh: but why ſhould he imagine the Soul of Man more heavy than his Senſes? Does not the Eye paſs from an unpleaſant Object to a pleaſant, in a much ſhorter time than is required to this? And does not the Unpleaſantneſs of the firſt commend the Beauty of the

latter? The old Rule of Logick might have convinc'd him, That contraries when plac'd near, ſet off each other. A continued Gravity keeps the Spirit too much bent; we muſt refreſh it ſometimes, as we bait in a Journey, that we may go on with greater eaſe. A Scene of Mirth mix'd with Tragedy, has the ſame effect upon us which our Muſick has betwixt the Acts, which we find a Relief to us from the beſt Plots and Language of the Stage, if the Diſcourſes have been long. I muſt therefore have ſtronger Arguments 'ere I am convinc'd, that Compaſſion and Mirth in the ſame Subject deſtroy each other, and in the mean time, cannot but conclude, to the Honor of our Nation, that we have invented, increas'd, and perfected a more pleaſant way of writing for the Stage, than was ever known to the Ancients or Moderns of any Nation, which is Tragi-Comedy.

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And this leads me to wonder why *Liſideius* and many others ſhould cry up the barrenneſs of the *French* Plots above the Variety and Copiouſneſs of the *Engliſh*. Their Plots are ſingle, they carry on one Deſign which is puſh'd forward by all the Actours, every Scene in the Play contributing and moving towards it: Our Plays, beſides the main Deſign, have Under-Plots, or By-Concernments, of leſs conſiderable Perſons, and Intrigues, which are carried on with the Motion of the main Plot: as they ſay the Orb of the fix'd Stars, and thoſe of the Planets, though they have Motions of their own, are whirl'd about by the motion of the *primum mobile*, in which they are contain'd: that ſimilitude expreſſes much of the *Engliſh* Stage: for if contrary Motions may be found in Nature to agree; if a Planet can go Eaſt and Weſt at the ſame time; one way by virtue of his own Motion, the other by the force of the firſt Mover; it will not be difficult to imagine how the Under-Plot, which is only different, not contrary to the great Deſign, may naturally be conducted along with it.

Eugenius has already ſhewn us, from the confeſſion of the *French* Poets, that the Unity of Action is ſufficiently preſerv'd, if all the imperfect Actions of the Play are conducing to the main Deſign: but when thoſe pretty Intrigues of a Play are ſo ill order'd, that they have no coherence with the other, I muſt grant that *Liſideius* has reaſon to tax that want of due connexion; for Co-ordination in a Play is as dangerous and unnatural as in a State. In the mean time, he muſt acknowledge our Variety, if well order'd, will afford a greater Pleaſure to the Audience.

As for his other Argument, that by purſuing one ſingle Theme they gain an advantage to expreſs and work up the Paſſions, I wiſh any Example he could bring from them would make it good: for I confeſs their Verſes are to me the coldeſt I have ever read: Neither indeed is it poſſible for them, in the way they take, ſo to expreſs Paſſion, as that the effects of it ſhould appear in the concernment of an Audience, their Speeches being ſo many Declamations, which tire us with the length; ſo that inſtead of perſwading us to grieve for their imaginary Heroes, we

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are concern'd for our own trouble, as we are in tedious Viſits of bad Company; we are in pain till they are gone. When the *French* Stage came to be reform'd by Cardinal *Richelieu*, thoſe long Harangues were introduc'd, to comply with the Gravity of a Churchman. Look upon the *Cinna* and the *Pompey*, they are not ſo properly to be called Plays, as long Diſcourſes of reaſon of State: and *Polieucte* in matters of Religion is as ſolemn as the long Stops upon our Organs. Since that time it is grown into a Cuſtom, and their Actours ſpeak by the Hour-glaſs, like our Parſons; nay, they account it the Grace of their Parts, and think themſelves diſparaged by the Poet, if they may not twice or thrice in a Play entertain the Audience with a Speech of an hundred lines. I deny not but this may ſuit well enough with the *French*; for as we, who are a more ſullen People, come to be diverted at our Plays; ſo they, who are of an aiery and gay Temper, come thither to make themſelves more ſerious: And this I conceive to be one reaſon, why Comedies are more pleaſing to us, and Tragedies to them. But to ſpeak generally, it cannot be deny'd, that ſhort Speeches and Replies are more apt to move the Paſſions, and beget Concernment in us, than the other: for it is unnatural for any one in a Guſt of Paſſion, to ſpeak long together, or for another, in the ſame condition, to ſuffer him without interruption. Grief and Paſſion are like Floods rais'd in little Brooks by a ſudden Rain; they are quickly up, and if the Concernment be pour'd unexpectedly in upon us, it overflows us: But a long ſober Shower gives them leiſure to run out as they came in, without troubling the ordinary Current. As for Comedy, Repartee is one of its chiefeſt Graces; the greateſt Pleaſure of the Audience is a Chace of Wit kept up on both ſides, and ſwiftly manag'd. And this our Fore-Fathers, if not we, have had in *Fletcher*'s Plays, to a much higher degree of Perfection, than the French Poets can, reaſonably, hope to reach.

There is another part of *Liſideius* his Diſcourſe, in which he has rather excus'd our Neighbours than commended them; that is, for aiming only to make one Perſon conſiderable in their Plays. 'Tis very true what he has urged, That one Character in all Plays, even without the Poet's Care, will have Advantage of all the others; and that the Deſign of the whole *Drama* will chiefly depend on it. But this hinders not that there may be more ſhining Characters in the Play: many Perſons of a ſecond Magnitude, nay, ſome ſo very near, ſo almoſt equal to the firſt, that Greatneſs may be oppos'd to Greatneſs, and all the Perſons be made conſiderable, not only by their Quality, but their Action. 'Tis evident, that the more the Perſons are, the greater will be the Variety of the Plot. If then the Parts are managed ſo regularly, that the Beauty of the whole be kept intire, and that the Variety become not a perplex'd and confus'd Maſs of Accidents; you will find it infinitely pleaſing to be led in a Labyrinth of Deſign, where you ſee ſome of your way before you, yet diſcern not the End till you arrive

at it. And that all this is practicable, I can produce for examples many of our *Engliſh* Plays: as the *Maids Tragedy*, the *Alchymiſt*, the *Silent Woman*; I was going to have named the *Fox*, but that the Unity of Deſign ſeems not exactly obſerv'd in it; for there appear two Actions in the Play; the firſt naturally ending with the fourth Act; the ſecond forc'd from it in the fifth: which yet is the leſs to be condemn'd in him, becauſe the Diſguiſe of *Volpone*, though it ſuited not with his Character as a crafty or covetous Perſon, agreed well enough with that of a voluptuary: and by it the Poet gain'd the end at which he aim'd, the Puniſhment of Vice, and the Reward of Vertue, both which that Diſguiſe produc'd. So that to judge equally of it, it was an excellent fifth Act, but not ſo naturally proceeding from the former.

But to leave this, and paſs to the latter part of *Liſideius* his Diſcourſe, which concerns Relations, I muſt acknowledge with him, that the *French* have reaſon to hide that part of the Action which would occaſion too much tumult on the Stage, and to chuſe rather to have it made known by narration to the Audience. Farther I think it very convenient, for the reaſons he has given, that all incredible Actions were remov'd; but, whether Cuſtom has ſo inſinuated it ſelf into our Country-men, or Nature has ſo form'd them to Fierceneſs, I know not; but they will ſcarcely ſuffer Combats and other Objects of Horror to be taken from them. And indeed, the Indecency of Tumults is all which can be objected againſt fighting: For why may not our Imagination as well ſuffer it ſelf to be deluded with the probability of it, as with any other thing in the Play? For my part, I can with as great eaſe perſwade my ſelf, that the blows are given in good earneſt, as I can, that they who ſtrike them are Kings or Princes, or thoſe Perſons which they repreſent. For Objects of Incredibility I would be ſatisfied from *Liſideius*, whether we have any ſo remov'd from all appearance of Truth, as are thoſe of *Corneille*'s *Andromede*? A Play which has been frequented the moſt of any he has writ. If the *Perſeus*, or the Son of an Heathen God, the *Pegaſus* and the Monſter, were not capable to choak a ſtrong belief, let him blame any Repreſentation of ours hereafter. Thoſe indeed were Objects of Delight; yet the reaſon is the ſame as to the probability: for he makes it not a Balette or Maſque, but a Play, which is to reſemble Truth. But for Death, that it ought not to be repreſented, I have, beſides the Arguments alledged by *Liſideius*, the Authority of *Ben. Johnſon*, who has forborn it in his Tragedies; for both the Death of *Sejanus* and *Cataline* are related: though in the latter I cannot but obſerve one Irregularity of that great Poet: he has remov'd the Scene in the ſame Act, from *Rome* to *Cataline*'s Army, and from thence again to *Rome*; and beſides, has allow'd a very inconſiderable time, after *Cataline*'s Speech, for the ſtriking of the Battle, and the return of *Petreius*, who is to relate the event of it to the Senate: which I ſhould not animadvert on him, who was otherwiſe a painful

painful obſerver of τὸ πρέπον, or the *decorum* of the Stage, if he had not us'd extream ſeverity in his judgment on the incomparable *Shakeſpeare* for the ſame fault. To conclude on this Subject of Relations, if we are to be blam'd for ſhewing too much of the action, the French are as faulty for diſcovering too little of it: a mean betwixt both ſhould be obſerved by every judicious Writer, ſo as the Audience may neither be left unſatisfied by not ſeeing what is beautiful, or ſhock'd by beholding what is either incredible or undecent. I hope I have already prov'd in this Diſcourſe, that though we are not altogether ſo punctual as the French, in obſerving the Laws of Comedy; yet our Errours are ſo few, and little, and thoſe things wherein we excel them ſo conſiderable, that we ought of right to be preferr'd before them. But what will *Liſideius* ſay, if they themſelves acknowledge they are too ſtrictly bounded by thoſe Laws, for breaking which he has blam'd the Engliſh? I will alledge *Corneille*'s words, as I find them in the end of his Diſcourſe of the three Unities; *Il eſt facile aux ſpeculatifs d'eſtre ſeveres*, &c. "'Tis eaſie for ſpeculative perſons to judge ſe-"verely; but if they would produce to publick view ten or twelve "pieces of this nature, they would perhaps give more latitude to the "Rules than I have done, when by experience they had known how "much we are limited and conſtrain'd by them, and how many beau-"ties of the Stage they baniſh'd from it. To illuſtrate a little what he has ſaid: By their ſervile obſervations of the unities of time and place, and integrity of Scenes, they have brought on themſelves that dearth of Plot, and narrowneſs of Imagination, which may be obſerv'd in all their Plays. How many beautiful accidents might naturally happen in two or three days, which cannot arrive with any probability in the compaſs of 24 hours? There is time to be allowed alſo for maturity of deſign, which amongſt great and prudent perſons, ſuch as are often repreſented in Tragedy, cannot, with any likelihood of truth, be brought to paſs at ſo ſhort a warning. Farther, By tying themſelves ſtrictly to the unity of place, and unbroken Scenes, they are forc'd many times to omit ſome beauties which cannot be ſhewn where the Act began; but might, if the Scene were interrupted, and the Stage clear'd for the perſons to enter in another place; and therefore the French Poets are often forc'd upon abſurdities: for if the Act begins in a Chamber, all the perſons in the Play muſt have ſome buſineſs or other to come thither, or elſe they are not to be ſhewn that Act, and ſometimes their characters are very unfitting to appear there: As, Suppoſe it were the King's Bed-chamber, yet the meaneſt Man in the Tragedy muſt come and diſpatch his buſineſs there, rather than in the Lobby or Court-yard, (which is fitter for him) for fear the Stage ſhould be clear'd, and the Scenes broken. Many times they fall by it into a greater inconvenience; for they keep their Scenes unbroken, and yet change the place; as in one of their

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neweſt Plays, where the Act begins in the Street. There a Gentleman is to meet his Friend; he ſees him with his Man, coming out from his Father's houſe; they talk together, and the firſt goes out: the ſecond, who is a Lover, has made an appointment with his Miſtreſs; ſhe appears at the Window, and then we are to imagine the Scene lies under it. This Gentleman is call'd away, and leaves his Servant with his Miſtreſs: preſently her Father is heard from within; the young Lady is afraid the Serving-man ſhould be diſcover'd, and thruſts him into a place of ſafety, which is ſuppos'd to be her Cloſet. After this, the Father enters to the Daughter, and now the Scene is in a Houſe: for he is ſeeking from one Room to another for this poor *Philipin*, or French *Diego*, who is heard from within, drolling and breaking many a miſerable conceit on the ſubject of his ſad condition. In this ridiculous manner the Play goes forward, the Stage being never empty all the while: ſo that the Street, the Window, the two Houſes, and the Cloſet, are made to walk about, and the Perſons to ſtand ſtill. Now what I beſeech you is more eaſie than to write a regular French Play, or more difficult than to write an irregular Engliſh one, like thoſe of *Fletcher*, or of *Shakeſpeare*?

If they content themſelves as *Corneille* did, with ſome flat deſign, which like an ill Riddle, is found out e're it be half propos'd; ſuch Plots we can make every way regular as eaſily as they: but when e're they endeavour to riſe to any quick turns and counter-turns of Plot, as ſome of them have attempted, ſince *Corneille*'s Plays have been leſs in vogue, you ſee they write as irregularly as we, though they cover it more ſpeciouſly. Hence the reaſon is perſpicuous, why no French Plays, when tranſlated, have, or ever can ſucceed on the Engliſh Stage. For, if you conſider the Plots, our own are fuller of variety; if the Writing, ours are more quick and fuller of ſpirit: and therefore 'tis a ſtrange miſtake in thoſe who decry the way of writing Plays in Verſe, as if the Engliſh therein imitated the French. We have borrowed nothing from them; our Plots are weav'd in Engliſh Looms: we endeavour therein to follow the variety and greatneſs of characters which are deriv'd to us from *Shakeſpeare* and *Fletcher*: the copiouſneſs and well-knitting of the intrigues we have from *Johnſon*, and for the Verſe it ſelf we have Engliſh Precedents of elder date than any of *Corneille*'s Plays: (not to name our old Comedies before *Shakeſpeare*, which were all writ in Verſe of ſix feet, or *Alexandrin*'s, ſuch as the French now uſe) I can ſhew in *Shakeſpeare*, many Scenes of rhyme together, and the like in *Ben. Johnſon*'s Tragedies: In *Cataline* and *Sejanus* ſometimes thirty or forty lines; I mean, beſides the Chorus, or the Monologues, which by the way, ſhew'd *Ben.* no enemy to this way of writing, eſpecially if you read his *Sad Shepherd*, which goes ſometimes on Rhyme, ſometimes on blank Verſe, like an Horſe who eaſes himſelf on Trot and Amble. You find him likewiſe commending *Fletcher*'s

cher's Paſtoral of the Faithful Shepherdeſs; which is for the moſt part Rhyme, though not refin'd to that purity to which it hath ſince been brought: And theſe Examples are enough to clear us from a ſervile imitation of the French.

But to return whence I have digreſs'd, I dare boldly affirm theſe two things of the Engliſh *Drama:* Firſt, That we have many Plays of ours as regular as any of theirs; and which, beſides, have more variety of Plot and Characters: And ſecondly, that in moſt of the irregular Plays of *Shakeſpeare* or *Fletcher*, (for *Ben. Johnſon*'s are for the moſt part regular) there is a more maſculine Fancy and greater Spirit in the writing, than there is in any of the French. I could produce even in *Shakeſpeare*'s and *Fletcher*'s Works, ſome Plays which are almoſt exactly form'd; as *The Merry Wives of* Windſor, and *The Scornful Lady:* but becauſe (generally ſpeaking) *Shakeſpeare*, who writ firſt, did not perfectly obſerve the Laws of Comedy, and *Fletcher*, who came nearer to perfection, yet through careleſneſs made many faults; I will take the pattern of a perfect Play from *Ben. Johnſon*, who was a careful and learned Obſerver of the Dramatique Laws, and from all his Comedies I ſhall ſelect *The Silent Woman*; of which I will make a ſhort Examen, according to thoſe Rules which the French obſerve.

As *Neander* was beginning to examine *The Silent Woman*, *Eugenius*, earneſtly regarding him; I beſeech you, *Neander*, ſaid he, gratifie the company and me in particular ſo far, as before you ſpeak of the Play, to give us a Character of the Author; and tell us frankly your opinion, whether you do not think all Writers, both French and Engliſh, ought to give place to him?

I fear, replied *Neander*, That in obeying your Commands, I ſhall draw ſome envy on my ſelf. Beſides, in performing them, it will be firſt neceſſary to ſpeak ſomewhat of *Shakeſpeare* and *Fletcher*, his Rivals in Poeſie; and one of them, in my opinion, at leaſt his equal, perhaps his ſuperiour.

To begin then with *Shakeſpeare*; he was the Man who of all Modern, and perhaps Ancient Poets, had the largeſt and moſt comprehenſive Soul. All the Images of Nature were ſtill preſent to him, and he drew them not laboriouſly, but luckily: when he deſcribes any thing, you more than ſee it, you feel it too. Thoſe who accuſe him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learn'd; he needed not the Spectacles of Books to read Nature; he look'd inwards, and found her there. I cannot ſay he is every where alike; were he ſo, I ſhould do him injury to compare him with the greateſt of Mankind. He is many times flat, inſipid; his Comick Wit degenerating into Clenches, his ſerious Swelling into Bombaſt. But he is always great, when ſome great occaſion is preſented to him: no Man can ſay he ever had a fit ſubject for his Wit, and did not then raiſe himſelf as high above the reſt of Poets,

Quantum lenta ſolent inter Viburna Cupreſſi.

The

The conſideration of this made Mr. *Hales* of *Eaton* ſay, That there was no Subject of which any Poet ever writ, but he would produce it much better done in *Shakeſpeare*; and however others are now generally preferr'd before him, yet the Age wherein he liv'd, which had Contemporaries with him, *Fletcher* and *Johnſon* never equall'd them to him in their eſteem: And in the laſt King's Court, when *Ben*'s reputation was at higheſt, Sir *John Suckling*, and with him the greater part of the Courtiers, ſet our *Shakeſpeare* far above him.

Beaumont and *Fletcher*, of whom I am next to ſpeak, had, with the advantage of *Shakeſpeare*'s Wit, which was their precedent, great natural gifts, improv'd by ſtudy. *Beaumont* eſpecially being ſo accurate a Judge of Plays, that *Ben. Johnſon* while he liv'd, ſubmitted all his Writings to his Cenſure, and, 'tis thought, us'd his Judgment in correcting, if not contriving all his Plots. What value he had for him, appears by the Verſes he writ to him; and therefore I need ſpeak no farther of it. The firſt Play that brought *Fletcher* and him in eſteem was their *Philaſter*; for before that, they had written two or three very unſucceſsfully: as the like is reported of *Ben. Johnſon*, before he writ *Every Man in his Humour*. Their Plots were generally more regularly than *Shakeſpeare*'s, eſpecially thoſe which were made before *Beaumont*'s death; and they underſtood and imitated the Converſation of Gentlemen much better; whoſe wild Debaucheries, and quickneſs of Wit in Reparties, no Poet before them, could paint as they have done. Humour, which *Ben. Johnſon* deriv'd from particular perſons, they made it not their buſineſs to deſcribe: they repreſented all the Paſſions very lively, but above all, Love. I am apt to believe the Engliſh Language in them arriv'd to its higheſt perfection; what words have ſince been taken in, are rather ſuperfluous than ornamental. Their Plays are now the moſt pleaſant and frequent entertainments of the Stage; two of theirs being acted through the Year for one of *Shakeſpeare*'s or *Johnſon*'s: the reaſon is, becauſe there is a certain gayety in their Comedies, and Pathos in their more ſerious Plays, which ſuits generally with all Mens humours. *Shakeſpeare*'s Language is likewiſe a little obſolete, and *Ben. Johnſon*'s Wit comes ſhort of theirs.

As for *Johnſon*, to whoſe Character I am now arriv'd, if we look upon him while he was himſelf, (for his laſt Plays were but his Dotages) I think him the moſt learned and judicious Writer which any Theater ever had. He was a moſt ſevere Judge of himſelf as well as others. One cannot ſay he wanted Wit, but rather that he was frugal of it. In his Works you find little to retrench or alter. Wit and Language, and Humour alſo in ſome meaſure we had before him; but ſomething of Art was wanting to the *Drama* till he came. He manag'd his ſtrength to more advantage than any who preceded him. You ſeldom find him making Love in any

any of his Scenes, or endeavouring to move the Paſſions; his Genius was too ſullen and Saturnine to do it gracefully, eſpecially when he knew he came after thoſe who had performed both to ſuch an height. Humour was his proper Sphere, and in that he delighted moſt to repreſent Mechanick People. He was deeply converſant in the Ancients, both *Greek* and *Latine*, and he borrow'd boldly from them: there is ſcarce a Poet or Hiſtorian among the *Roman* Authours of thoſe times whom he has not tranſlated in *Sejanus* and *Cataline*. But he has done his Robberies ſo openly, that one may ſee he fears not to be taxed by any Law. He invades Authours like a Monarch, and what would be Theft in other Poets, is only Victory in him. With the ſpoils of theſe Writers he ſo repreſents old *Rome* to us, in its Rites, Ceremonies, and Cuſtoms, that if one of their Poets had written either of his Tragedies, we had ſeen leſs of it than in him. If there was any fault in his Language, 'twas, that he weav'd it too cloſely and laborioufly, in his Comedies eſpecially: perhaps too, he did a little too much Romanize our Tongue, leaving the words which he tranſlated almoſt as much *Latine* as he found them: wherein though he learnedly followed their Language, he did not enough comply with the Idiom of ours. If I would compare him with *Shakeſpeare*, I muſt acknowledge him the more correct Poet, but *Shakeſpeare* the greater Wit. *Shakeſpeare* was the *Homer*, or Father of our Dramatick Poets; *Johnſon* was the *Virgil*, the Pattern of elaborate Writing; I admire him, but I love *Shakeſpeare*. To conclude of him, as he has given us the moſt correct Plays, ſo in the Precepts which he has laid down in his Diſcoveries, we have as many and profitable Rules for perfecting the Stage as any wherewith the *French* can furniſh us.

Having thus ſpoken of the Authour, I proceed to the Examination of his Comedy, *The Silent Woman*.

Examen of the Silent Woman.

To begin firſt with the Length of the Action; it is ſo far from exceeding the Compaſs of a Natural Day, that it takes not up an Artificial one. 'Tis all included in the Limits of Three hours and an half, which is no more than is required for the Preſentment on the Stage. A Beauty perhaps not much obſerv'd; if it had, we ſhould not have look'd on the *Spaniſh* Tranſlation of Five hours with ſo much Wonder. The Scene of it is laid in *London*; the Latitude of Place is almoſt as little as you can imagine: for it lies all within the Compaſs of two Houſes, and after the firſt Act, in one. The Continuity of Scenes is obſerv'd more than in any of our Plays, except his own *Fox* and *Alchymiſt*. They are not broken above twice or thrice at moſt, in the whole Comedy, and in the two beſt of *Corneille*'s Plays, the *Cid* and *Cinna*, they are interrupted once. The Action of the Play is intirely one; the end or Aim of which is the ſettling *Moroſe*'s Eſtate on *Dauphine*. The Intrigue of it is the greateſt and moſt Noble of any pure unmix'd Comedy in any Language: you ſee in it many

Perſons of various Characters and Humours, and all delightful: As firſt, *Moroſe*, or an old Man, to whom all Noiſe, but his own talking, is offenſive. Some, who would be thought Criticks, ſay this Humour of his is forc'd: but to remove that Objection, we may conſider him, firſt, to be naturally of a delicate hearing, as many are to whom all ſharp Sounds are unpleaſant; and ſecondly, we may attribute much of it to the peeviſhneſs of his Age, or the wayward Authority of an old Man in his own Houſe, where he may make himſelf obeyed; and to this the Poet ſeems to allude in his Name *Moroſe*. Beſide this, I am aſſur'd from divers Perſons, that *Ben. Johnſon* was actually acquainted with ſuch a Man, one altogether as ridiculous as he is here repreſented. Others ſay it is not enough to find one Man of ſuch an Humour; it muſt be common to more, and the more common the more natural. To prove this, they inſtance in the beſt of Comical Characters, *Falſtaffe*: There are many Men reſembling him; Old, Fat, Merry, Cowardly, Drunken, Amorous, Vain, and Lying: But to convince theſe people, I need but tell them, that Humour is the ridiculous extravagance of Converſation, wherein one Man differs from all others. If then it be common, or communicated to many, how differs it from other Mens? Or what indeed cauſes it to be ridiculous ſo much as the ſingularity of it? As for *Falſtaffe*, he is not properly one Humour, but a Miſcellany of Humours or Images, drawn from ſo many ſeveral Men; that wherein he is ſingular is his Wit, or thoſe things he ſays, *præter expectatum*, unexpected by the Audience; his quick evaſions when you imagine him ſurpriz'd, which as they are extremely diverting of themſelves, ſo receive a great addition from his Perſon; for the very ſight of ſuch an unweildy old debauch'd Fellow, is a Comedy alone. And here having a place ſo proper for it, I cannot but enlarge ſomewhat upon this Subject of Humour into which I am fallen. The Ancients have little of it in their Comedies; for the τὸ γελοῖον, of the old Comedy, of which *Ariſtophanes* was chief, was not ſo much to imitate a Man, as to make the People laugh at ſome odd Conceit, which had commonly ſomewhat of unnatural or obſcene in it. Thus when you ſee *Socrates* brought upon the Stage, you are not to imagine him made ridiculous by the Imitation of his Actions, but rather by making him perform ſomething very unlike himſelf: ſomething ſo childiſh and abſurd, as by comparing it with the Gravity of the true *Socrates*, makes a ridiculous Object for the Spectators. In their new Comedy which ſucceeded, the Poets ſought indeed to expreſs the ἦθος, as in their Tragedies the πάθος of Mankind. But this ἦθος contain'd only the general Characters of Men and Manners; as Old Men, Lovers, Serving-men, Courtizans, Paraſites, and ſuch other Perſons as we ſee in their Comedies; all which they made alike: that is, one Old Man or Father; one Lover, one Courtizan ſo like another, as if the firſt of them had begot the reſt

of every ſort: *Ex homine hunc natum dicas.* The ſame Cuſtom they obſerv'd likewiſe in the Tragedies. As for the *French*, though they have the word *humeur* among them, yet they have ſmall uſe of it in their Comedies, or Farces; they being but ill Imitations of the *ridiculum*, or that which ſtirr'd up Laughter in the old Comedy. But among the *Engliſh* 'tis otherwiſe: where, by Humour is meant ſome extravagant Habit, Paſſion, or Affection; particular (as I ſaid before) to ſome one Perſon: by the oddneſs of which, he is immediately diſtinguiſh'd from the reſt of Men; which being lively and naturally repreſented, moſt frequently begets that malicious pleaſure in the Audience which is teſtified by Laughter: as all things which are Deviations from Cuſtoms are ever the apteſt to produce it; though by the way this Laughter is only accidental, as the Perſon repreſented is Fantaſtick or Bizarre; but Pleaſure is eſſential to it, as the Imitation of what is natural. The Deſcription of theſe Humours, drawn from the Knowledge and Obſervation of particular Perſons, was the peculiar Genius and Talent of *Ben. Johnſon*; to whoſe Play I now return.

Beſides *Moroſe*, there are at leaſt, nine or ten different Characters and Humours in the *Silent Woman*, all which Perſons have ſeveral Concernments of their own, yet all us'd by the Poet, to the conducting of the main Deſign to Perfection. I ſhall not waſte time in commending the writing of this Play, but I will give you my Opinion, that there is more Wit and acuteneſs of Fancy in it than in any of *Ben. Johnſon*'s. Beſides, that he has here deſcrib'd the Converſation of Gentlemen in the perſons of *True-Wit*, and his Friends, with more Gayety, Air, and Freedom, than in the reſt of his Comedies. For the Contrivance of the Plot, 'tis extreme elaborate, and yet withal eaſie; for the λύσις, or untying of it, 'tis ſo admirable, that when it is done, no one of the Audience would think the Poet could have miſs'd it; and yet it was conceal'd ſo much before the laſt Scene, that any other way would ſooner have enter'd into your Thoughts. But I dare not take upon me to commend the Fabrick of it, becauſe it is altogether ſo full of Art, that I muſt unravel every Scene in it to commend it as I ought. And this excellent Contrivance is ſtill the more to be admir'd, becauſe 'tis Comedy where the Perſons are only of common Rank, and their buſineſs private, not elevated by Paſſions or high Concernments, as in ſerious Plays. Here every one is a proper Judge of all he ſees; nothing is repreſented but that with which he daily converſes: ſo that by conſequence all faults lie open to diſcovery, and few are pardonable. 'Tis this which *Horace* has judiciouſly obſerv'd:

Creditur ex medio quia res arceſſit habere
Sudoris minimum, ſed habet Comœdia tanto
Plus oneris, quanto veniæ minus. --------

But our Poet, who was not ignorant of theſe difficulties, has made uſe of all Advantages; as he who deſigns a large leap, takes his riſe from the higheſt ground. One of theſe advantages, is that which *Corneille* has laid down as the greateſt which can arrive to any Poem, and which he himſelf could never compaſs above thrice in all his Plays, *viz.* the making choice of ſome ſignal and long-expected day, whereon the Action of the Play is to depend. This day was that deſign'd by *Dauphine*, for the ſetling of his Uncle's Eſtate upon him; which to compaſs he contrives to marry him: That the Marriage had been plotted by him long beforehand, is made evident, by what he tells *True-Wit* in the ſecond Act, that in one moment he had deſtroy'd what he had been raiſing many months.

There is another Artifice of the Poet, which I cannot here omit, becauſe by the frequent practice of it in his Comedies, he has left it to us almoſt as a Rule, that is, when he has any Character or Humour wherein he would ſhew a *Coupe de Maiſtre*, or his higheſt skill; he recommends it to your obſervation, by a pleaſant deſcription of it before the Perſon firſt appears. Thus, in *Bartholomew-Fair*, he gives you the Pictures of *Numps* and *Cokes*, and in this, thoſe of *Daw*, *Lafoole*, *Moroſe*, and the *Collegiate Ladies*; all which you hear deſcrib'd before you ſee them. So that before they come upon the Stage you have a longing expectation of them, which prepares you to receive them favourably; and when they are there, even from their firſt appearance you are ſo far acquainted with them, that nothing of their humour is loſt to you.

I will obſerve yet one thing further of this admirable Plot; the buſineſs of it riſes in every Act. The ſecond is greater than the firſt; the third than the ſecond, and ſo forward to the fifth. There too you ſee, till the very laſt Scene, new difficulties ariſing to obſtruct the Action of the Play; and when the Audience is brought into deſpair, that the buſineſs can naturally be effected, then, and not before, the diſcovery is made. But that the Poet might entertain you with more Variety all this while, he reſerves ſome new Characters to ſhow you, which he opens not till the ſecond and third Act. In the ſecond, *Moroſe*, *Daw*, the *Barber* and *Otter*; in the third, the *Collegiate Ladies*: All which he moves afterwards in by-walks, or under-Plots, as Diverſions to the main deſign, leſt it ſhould grow tedious, though they are ſtill naturally join'd with it, and ſomewhere or other ſubſervient to it. Thus, like a skilful Cheſs-player, by little and little, he draws out his Men, and makes his Pawns of uſe to his greater Perſons.

If this Comedy, and ſome others of his, were tranſlated into French Proſe (which would now be no wonder to them, ſince *Moliere* has lately given them Plays out of Verſe, which have not diſpleas'd them) I believe the Controverſie would ſoon be decided betwixt the two Nations, even making them the Judges. But we need not call our Heroes to our Aid; Be it ſpoken to the Honour of the *Engliſh*, our Nation

Nation can never want in any Age ſuch who are able to diſpute the Empire of Wit with any People in the Univerſe. And though the fury of a Civil War, and Power, for twenty Years together, abandon'd to a barbarous Race of Men, Enemies of all good Learning, had buried the Muſes under the ruins of Monarchy; yet with the reſtoration of our Happineſs, we ſee reviv'd Poeſie lifting up its head, and already ſhaking off the rubbiſh which lay ſo heavy on it. We have ſeen ſince his Majeſty's return, many Dramatick Poems which yield not to thoſe of any foreign Nation, and which deſerve all Laurels but the Engliſh. I will ſet aſide Flattery and Envy: it cannot be deny'd but we have had ſome little blemiſh either in the Plot or Writing of all thoſe Plays which have been made within theſe ſeven Years: (and perhaps there is no Nation in the World ſo quick to diſcern them, or ſo difficult to pardon them, as ours:) yet if we can perſwade our ſelves to uſe the candour of that Poet, who (though the moſt ſevere of Criticks) has left us this caution by which to moderate our cenſures;

-----Ubi plura nitent in carmine, non ego paucis offendar maculis.

If in conſideration of their many and great Beauties, we can wink at ſome ſlight and little Imperfections; if we, I ſay, can be thus equal to our ſelves, I ask no favour from the French. And if I do not venture upon any particular judgment of our late Plays, 'tis out of the conſideration which an Ancient Writer gives me; *Vivorum, ut magna admiratio, ita cenſura difficilis:* betwixt the extreams of admiration and malice, 'tis hard to judge upright of the living. Only I think it may be permitted me to ſay, that as it is no leſs'ning to us to yield to ſome Plays, and thoſe not many of our own Nation in the laſt Age, ſo can it be no addition to pronounce of our preſent Poets, that they have far ſurpaſs'd all the Ancients, and the Modern Writers of other Countries.

This was the ſubſtance of what was then ſpoke on that occaſion; and *Liſideius*, I think was going to reply, when he was prevented thus by *Crites:* I am confident, ſaid he, that the moſt material things that can be ſaid, have been already urg'd on either ſide; if they have not, I muſt beg of *Liſideius* that he will defer his Anſwer till another time: for I confeſs I have a joynt Quarrel to you both, becauſe you have concluded, without any reaſon given for it, that Rhyme is proper for the Stage. I will not diſpute how ancient it hath been among us to write this way; perhaps our Anceſtors knew no better till *Shakeſpeare*'s time. I will grant it was not altogether left by him, and that *Fletcher* and *Ben. Johnſon* us'd it frequently in their Paſtorals, and ſometimes in other Plays. Farther, I will not argue whether we receiv'd it originally from our own Countrymen, or from the French; for that

that is an inquiry of as little benefit as theirs, who in the midſt of the late Plague were not ſo ſollicitous to provide againſt it, as to know whether we had it from the malignity of our own Air, or by tranſportation from *Holland.* I have therefore only to affirm, That it is not allowable in ſerious Plays; for Comedies I find you already concluding with me. To prove this, I might ſatisfie my ſelf to tell you, how much in vain it is for you to ſtrive againſt the ſtream of the Peoples inclination; the greateſt part of which are prepoſſeſs'd ſo much with thoſe excellent Plays of *Shakeſpeare*, *Fletcher*, and *Ben. Johnſon*, (which have been written out of Rhyme) that except you could bring them ſuch as were written better in it, and thoſe too by perſons of equal reputation with them, it will be impoſſible for you to gain your cauſe with them, who will ſtill be judges. This it is to which in fine all your reaſons muſt ſubmit. The unanimous conſent of an Audience is ſo powerful, that even *Julius Cæſar* (as *Macrobius* reports of him) when he was perpetual Dictator, was not able to ballance it on the other ſide. But when *Laberius*, a Roman Knight, at his requeſt contended in the *Mime* with another Poet, he was forc'd to cry out, *Etiam favente me victus es Laberi.* But I will not on this occaſion, take the advantage of the greater number, but only urge ſuch reaſons againſt Rhyme, as I find in the Writings of thoſe who have argu'd for the other way. Firſt then, I am of opinion, that Rhyme is unnatural in a Play, becauſe Dialogue there is preſented as the effect of ſudden thought. For a Play is the imitation of Nature; and ſince no Man, without premeditation, ſpeaks in Rhyme, neither ought he to do it on the Stage; this hinders not but the Fancy may be there elevated to an higher pitch of thought than it is in ordinary diſcourſe: for there is a probability that Men of excellent and quick parts may ſpeak noble things *ex tempore*: but thoſe thoughts are never fetter'd with the numbers or ſound of Verſe without ſtudy, and therefore it cannot be but unnatural to preſent the moſt free way of ſpeaking, in that which is the moſt conſtrain'd. For this Reaſon, ſays *Ariſtotle*, 'Tis beſt to write Tragedy in that kind of Verſe which is the leaſt ſuch, or which is neareſt Proſe: and this amongſt the Ancients was the Iambique, and with us is blank Verſe, or the meaſure of Verſe, kept exactly without Rhyme. Theſe Numbers therefore are fitteſt for a Play; the others for a Paper of Verſes, or a Poem; blank Verſe being as much below them, as Rhyme is improper for the *Drama.* And if it be objected, that neither are blank Verſes made *ex tempore*, yet as neareſt Nature, they are ſtill to be preferr'd. But there are two particular Exceptions which many beſides my ſelf have had to Verſe; by which it will appear yet more plainly, how improper it is in Plays. And the firſt of them is grounded on that very reaſon for which ſome have commended Rhyme: they ſay the quickneſs of Repartees in argumentative Scenes receives an ornament from Verſe. Now what is more unreaſonable than

than to imagine, that a Man ſhould not only imagine the Wit, but the Rhyme too upon the ſudden? This nicking of him who ſpoke before both in ſound and meaſure, is ſo great an happineſs, that you muſt at leaſt ſuppoſe the perſons of your Play to be born Poets, *Arcades omnes & cantare pares & reſpondere parati*, they muſt have arriv'd to the degree of *quicquid conâbar dicere*: to make Verſes almoſt whether they will or no: if they are any thing below this, it will look rather like the deſign of two, than the anſwer of one: it will appear that your Actors hold intelligence together, that they perform their tricks like Fortune-tellers, by confederacy. The hand of Art will be too viſible in it againſt that Maxim of all Profeſſions; *Ars eſt celare artem*, That it is the greateſt perfection of Art to keep it ſelf undiſcover'd. Nor will it ſerve you to object, that however you manage it, 'tis ſtill known to be a Play; and conſequently the Dialogue of two perſons underſtood to be the labour of one Poet. For a Play is ſtill an imitation of Nature; we know we are to be deceiv'd, and we deſire to be ſo; but no Man ever was deceiv'd but with a probability of truth, for who will ſuffer a groſs lie to be faſten'd on him? Thus we ſufficiently underſtand that the Scenes which repreſent Cities and Countries to us, are not really ſuch, but only painted on Boards and Canvaſs: But ſhall that excuſe the ill painture or deſignment of them? Nay, rather, ought they not to be labour'd with ſo much the more diligence and exactneſs to help the imagination, ſince the mind of Man does naturally tend to truth? and therefore the nearer any thing comes to the imitation of it, the more it pleaſes.

Thus, you ſee, your Rhyme is uncapable of expreſſing the greateſt thoughts naturally, and the loweſt it cannot with any grace: for what is more unbefitting the Majeſty of Verſe, than to call a Servant, or bid a Door be ſhut in Rhyme? And yet you are often forc'd on this miſerable neceſſity. But Verſe, you ſay, circumſcribes a quick and luxuriant fancy, which would extend it ſelf too far on every ſubject, did not the labour which is requir'd to well turn'd and poliſh'd Rhyme, ſet bounds to it. Yet this Argument, if granted, would only prove, that we may write better in Verſe, but not more naturally. Neither is it able to evince that; for he who wants judgment to confine his fancy in blank Verſe, may want it as much in Rhyme; and he who has it will avoid errours in both kinds. Latine Verſe was as great a confinement to the imagination of thoſe Poets, as Rhyme to ours: and yet you find *Ovid* ſaying too much on every ſubject. *Neſcivit* (ſays *Seneca*) *quod bene ceſſit relinquere*: of which he gives you one famous inſtance in his Deſcription of the Deluge,

Omnia pontus erat, deerant quoque Litora Ponto.

Now all was Sea, nor had that Sea a Shore. Thus *Ovid*'s fancy was not limited by Verſe, and *Virgil* needed not Verſe to have bounded his.

In

In our own Language we ſee *Ben. Johnſon* confining himſelf to what ought to be ſaid, even in the liberty of blank Verſe; and yet *Corneille*, the moſt judicious of the *French* Poets, is ſtill varying the ſame ſenſe an hundred ways, and dwelling eternally on the ſame Subject, though confin'd by Rhyme. Some other Exceptions I have to Verſe, but ſince theſe I have nam'd are for the moſt part already publick; I conceive it reaſonable they ſhould firſt be anſwer'd.

It concerns me leſs than any, ſaid *Neander*, (ſeeing he had ended) to reply to this Diſcourſe; becauſe when I ſhould have prov'd, that Verſe may be natural in Plays, yet I ſhould always be ready to confeſs, that thoſe which I have written in this kind come ſhort of that perfection which is requir'd. Yet ſince you are pleas'd I ſhould undertake this Province, I will do it, though with all imaginable reſpect and deference, both to that Perſon from whom you have borrow'd your ſtrongeſt Arguments, and to whoſe Judgment when I have ſaid all, I finally ſubmit. But before I proceed to anſwer your Objections, I muſt firſt remember you, that I exclude all Comedy from my defence; and next, that I deny not but blank Verſe may be alſo us'd, and content my ſelf only to aſſert, that in ſerious Plays where the Subject and Characters are great, and the Plot unmix'd with Mirth, which might allay or divert theſe Concernments which are produc'd as Rhyme, is there as natural, and more effectual than blank Verſe.

And now having laid down this as a Foundation, to begin with *Crites*, I muſt crave leave to tell him, that ſome of his Arguments againſt Rhyme reach no farther than from the faults or defects of ill Rhyme, to conclude againſt the uſe of it in general. May not I conclude againſt blank Verſe by the ſame reaſon? If the words of ſome Poets who write in it, are either ill choſen, or ill placed, (which makes not only Rhyme, but all kind of Verſe in any Language unnatural;) Shall I, for their vicious affectation, condemn thoſe excellent Lines of *Fletcher*, which are written in that kind? Is there any thing in Rhyme more conſtrain'd than this Line in blank Verſe? *I Heav'n invoke, and ſtrong reſiſtance make*; where you ſee both the clauſes are plac'd unnaturally; that is, contrary to the common way of ſpeaking, and that without the excuſe of a Rhyme to cauſe it: yet you would think me very ridiculous, if I ſhould accuſe the ſtubbornneſs of blank Verſe for this, and not rather the ſtiffneſs of the Poet. Therefore, *Crites*, you muſt either prove that words, though well choſen, and duly plac'd, yet render not Rhyme natural in it ſelf; or that however natural and eaſie the Rhyme may be, yet it is not proper for a Play. If you inſiſt on the former part, I would ask you what other conditions are requir'd to make Rhyme natural in it ſelf, beſides an election of apt words, and a right diſpoſition of them? For the due choice of your words expreſſes your ſenſe naturally, and the due placing them adapts the Rhyme to it. If you object, that one Verſe may be made for the ſake of another, though

though both the Words and Rhyme be apt: I anſwer, it cannot poſſibly ſo fall out; for either there is a dependance of ſenſe betwixt the firſt line and the ſecond, or there is none: if there be that connection, then in the natural poſition of the words, the latter line muſt of neceſſity flow from the former: if there be no dependance, yet ſtill the due ordering of words makes the laſt line as natural in it ſelf as the other: ſo that the neceſſity of a Rhyme never forces any but bad or lazy Writers to ſay what they would not otherwiſe. 'Tis true, there is both Care and Art requir'd to write in Verſe; A good Poet never eſtabliſhes the firſt line, till he has ſought out ſuch a Rhyme as may fit the ſenſe, already prepar'd to heighten the ſecond: many times the cloſe of the ſenſe falls into the middle of the next Verſe, or farther of, and he may often prevail himſelf of the ſame advantages in Engliſh which *Virgil* had in Latine, he may break off in the *Hemyſtich*, and begin another line: indeed, the not obſerving theſe two laſt things, makes Plays, which are writ in Verſe, ſo tedious: for though, moſt commonly, the ſenſe is to be confin'd to the Couplet, yet nothing that does *perpetuo tenore fluere*, run in the ſame channel, can pleaſe always. 'Tis like the murmuring of a Stream, which not varying in the fall, cauſes at firſt attention, at laſt drowſineſs. Variety of cadences is the beſt rule, the greateſt help to the Actors, and refreſhment to the Audience.

If then Verſe may be made natural in it ſelf, how becomes it unnatural in a Play? You ſay the Stage is the repreſentation of Nature, and no Man in ordinary converſation ſpeaks in Rhyme. But you foreſaw, when you ſaid this, that it might be anſwer'd; neither does any Man ſpeak in blank Verſe, or in Meaſure without Rhyme. Therefore you concluded, that which is neareſt Nature is ſtill to be preferr'd. But you took no notice, that Rhyme might be made as natural as blank Verſe, by the well placing of the words, *&c.* all the difference between them when they are both correct, is the ſound in one, which the other wants; and if ſo, the ſweetneſs of it, and all the advantage reſulting from it, which are handled in the Preface to the *Rival Ladies*, will yet ſtand good. As for that place of *Ariſtotle*, where he ſays Plays ſhould be writ in that kind of Verſe which is neareſt Proſe; it makes little for you, blank Verſe being properly but meaſur'd Proſe. Now Meaſure alone in any modern Language, does not conſtitute Verſe; thoſe of the Ancients in Greek and Latine, conſiſted in quantity of words, and a determinate number of feet. But when, by the inundation of the *Goths* and *Vandals* into *Italy* new Languages were introduced, and barbarouſly mingled with the Latine (of which the *Italian*, *Spaniſh*, *French*, and ours, (made out of them and the *Teutonick*) are Dialects:) a new way of Poeſie was practis'd; new, I ſay, in thoſe Countries, for in all probability it was that of the Conquerours in their own Nations: at leaſt we are able to prove, that the Eaſtern People have us'd it from all Antiquity, *Vid.* Dan. *his Defence of Rhyme*. This new way conſiſted in

Meaſure or Number of Feet and Rhyme. The ſweetneſs of Rhyme, and obſervation of Accent, ſupplying the place of quantity in Words, which could neither exactly be obſerv'd by thoſe *Barbarians* who knew not the Rules of it, neither was it ſuitable to their Tongues as it had been to the Greek and Latine. No Man is tied in Modern Poeſie to obſerve any farther Rule in the Feet of his Verſe, but that they be diſſylables; whether *Spondee*, *Trochee*, or *Iambique*, it matters not; only he is obliged to Rhyme: Neither do the *Spaniſh*, *French*, *Italian*, or *Germans*, acknowledge at all, or very rarely, any ſuch kind of Poeſie as blank Verſe amongſt them. Therefore, at moſt, 'tis but a Poetick Proſe, a *Sermo pedeſtris*, and, as ſuch, moſt fit for Comedies, where I acknowledge Rhyme to be improper. Farther, As to that Quotation of *Ariſtotle*, our Couplet Verſes may be rendred as near Proſe as blank Verſe it ſelf by uſing thoſe advantages I lately nam'd, as breaks in an Hemyſtick, or running the Senſe into another line, thereby making Art and Order appear as looſe and free as Nature; or not tying our ſelves to Couplets ſtrictly, we may uſe the benefit of the Pindarique way, practis'd in the Siege of *Rhodes*; where the Numbers vary and the Rhyme is diſpos'd careleſly, and far from often chyming. Neither is that other advantage of the Ancients to be deſpis'd, of changing the kind of Verſe when they pleaſe with the change of the Scene, or ſome new entrance: for they confine not themſelves always to *Iambiques*, but extend their liberty to all *Lyrique* Numbers, and ſometimes even to *Hexameter*. But I need not go ſo far to prove that Rhyme, as it ſucceeds to all other Offices of Greek and Latine Verſe, ſo eſpecially to this of Plays, ſince the cuſtom of Nations at this day confirms it, the *French*, *Italian* and *Spaniſh* Tragedies are generally writ in it, and ſure the univerſal Conſent of the moſt civiliz'd parts of the World, ought in this, as it doth in other Cuſtoms, to include the reſt.

But perhaps you may tell me I have propos'd ſuch a Way to make Rhyme natural, and conſequently proper to Plays, as is unpracticable, and that I ſhall ſcarce find ſix or eight lines together in any Play, where the words are ſo plac'd and choſen as is requir'd to make it natural. I anſwer, No Poet need conſtrain himſelf at all times to it. It is enough he makes it his general Rule; for I deny not but ſometimes there may be a greatneſs in placing the words otherwiſe; and ſometimes they may ſound better, ſometimes alſo the variety it ſelf is excuſe enough. But if, for the moſt part, the words be plac'd as they are in the negligence of Proſe, it is ſufficient to denominate the way practicable; for we eſteem that to be ſuch, which in the tryal oftner ſucceeds than miſſes. And thus far you may find the Practice made good in many Plays; where you do not, remember ſtill, that if you cannot find ſix natural Rhymes together, it will be as hard for you to produce as many lines in blank Verſe, even among the greateſt of our Poets, againſt which I cannot make ſome reaſonable exception.

And

And this, Sir, calls to my remembrance the beginning of your Diſcourſe, where you told us we ſhould never find the Audience favourable to this kind of Writing, till we could produce as good Plays in Rhyme, as *Ben. Johnſon*, *Fletcher*, and *Shakeſpeare*, had writ out of it. But it is to raiſe envy to the living, to compare them with the dead. They are honour'd, and almoſt ador'd by us, as they deſerve; neither do I know any ſo preſumptuous of themſelves as to contend with them. Yet give me leave to ſay thus much, without injury to their Aſhes, that not only we ſhall never equal them, but they could never equal themſelves, were they to riſe and write again. We acknowledge them our Fathers in Wit, but they have ruin'd their Eſtates themſelves before they came to their Childrens hands. There is ſcarce an Humour, a Character, or any kind of Plot, which they have not us'd. All comes ſullied or waſted to us: and were they to entertain this Age, they could not now make ſo plenteous treatments out of ſuch decay'd Fortunes. This therefore will be a good Argument to us either not to write at all, or to attempt ſome other way. There is no Bays to be expected in their Walks; *Tentandia via eſt quâ me quoque poſſum tollere humo.*

This way of writing in Verſe, they have only left free to us; our Age is arriv'd to a perfection in it, which they never knew; and which (if we may gueſs by what of theirs we have ſeen in Verſe (as the *Faithful Shepherdeſs*, and *Sad Shepherd:*) 'tis probable they never could have reach'd. For the Genius of every Age is different: and though ours excel in this, I deny not but that to imitate Nature in that perfection which they did in Proſe, is a greater commendation than to write in Verſe exactly. As for what you have added, that the People are not generally inclin'd to like this way; if it were true, it would be no wonder, that betwixt the ſhaking off an old habit, and the introducing of a new, there ſhould be difficulty. Do we not ſee them ſtick to *Hopkins* and *Sternhold*'s Pſalms, and forſake thoſe of *David*, I mean *Sandys* his Tranſlation of them? If by the People, you underſtand the Multitude, the οἱ πολλοὶ, 'tis no matter what they think; they are ſometimes in the right, ſometimes in the wrong; their judgment is a meer Lottery. *Eſt ubi plebs rectè putat, eſt ubi peccat.* *Horace* ſays it of the Vulgar, judging Poeſie. But if you mean the mix'd Audience of the Populace, and the Nobleſs, I dare confidently affirm, that a great part of the latter ſort, are already favourable to Verſe; and that no ſerious Plays written ſince the King's return have been more kindly receiv'd by them, than the Siege of *Rhodes*, the *Muſtapha*, the *Indian* Queen, and *Indian* Emperor.

But I come now to the inference of your firſt Argument. You ſaid, that the Dialogue of Plays is preſented as the effect of ſudden thought, but no Man ſpeaks ſuddenly, or *ex tempore* in Rhyme: And you inferr'd from thence, that Rhyme, which you acknowledge to be proper to

Epique Poeſie cannot equally be proper to Dramatick, unleſs we could ſuppoſe all Men born ſo much more than Poets, that Verſes ſhould be made in them, not by them.

It has been formerly urg'd by you, and confeſs'd by me, that ſince no Man ſpoke any kind of Verſe *ex tempore*, that which was neareſt Nature was to be preferr'd. I anſwer you therefore, by diſtinguiſhing betwixt what is neareſt to the nature of Comedy, which is the imitation of common perſons and ordinary ſpeaking, and what is neareſt the nature of a ſerious Play: this laſt is indeed the repreſentation of Nature, but 'tis Nature wrought up to an higher pitch. The Plot, the Characters, the Wit, the Paſſions, the Deſcriptions, are all exalted above the level of common converſe, as high as the imagination of the Poet can carry them, with proportion to veriſimility. Tragedy we know is wont to image to us the Minds and Fortunes of Noble Perſons, and to portray theſe exactly; Heroick Rhyme is neareſt Nature, as being the nobleſt kind of modern Verſe.

Indignatur enim privatis, & prope ſocco,
Dignis carminibus, narrari cœna Thyeſtæ. (Says *Horace.*)

And in another place,

Effutire leveis indigna tragœdia verſus.

Blank Verſe is acknowledg'd to be too low for a Poem; nay more, for a Paper of Verſes; but if too low for an ordinary Sonnet, how much more for Tragedy, which is by *Ariſtotle*, in the diſpute betwixt the Epique Poeſie and the Dramatick, for many reaſons he there alledges, rank'd above it?

But ſetting this defence aſide, your Argument is almoſt as ſtrong againſt the uſe of Rhyme in Poems as in Plays; for the Epique way is every where interlac'd with Dialogue, or diſcourſive Scenes; and therefore you muſt either grant Rhyme to be improper there, which is contrary to your aſſertion, or admit it into Plays by the ſame title which you have given it to Poems. For though Tragedy be juſtly preferr'd above the other, yet there is a great affinity between them, as may eaſily be diſcover'd in that definition of a Play which *Liſideius* gave us. The Genus of them is the ſame, a juſt and lively Image of Humane Nature, in its Actions, Paſſions, and Traverſes of Fortune: ſo is the end, namely for the Delight and Benefit of Mankind. The Characters and Perſons are ſtill the ſame, *viz.* the greateſt of both ſorts, only the manner of acquainting us with thoſe Actions, Paſſions and Fortunes is different. Tragedy performs it *viva voce*, or by action, in Dialogue, wherein it excels the Epique Poem, which does it chiefly by narration, and therefore is not ſo lively an Image of Humane Nature. However,

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the agreement betwixt them is ſuch, that if Rhyme be proper for one, it muſt be for the other. Verſe, 'tis true, is not the effect of ſudden thought; but this hinders not that ſudden thought may be repreſented in Verſe, ſince thoſe thoughts are ſuch as muſt be higher than Nature can raiſe them without premeditation, eſpecially to a continuance of them even out of Verſe, and conſequently you cannot imagine them to have been ſudden either in the Poet, or the Actors. A Play, as I have ſaid, to be like Nature, is to be ſet above it; as Statues which are plac'd on high are made greater than the life, that they may deſcend to the ſight in their juſt proportion.

Perhaps I have inſiſted too long on this Objection; but the clearing of it will make my ſtay ſhorter on the reſt. You tell us, *Crites*, that Rhyme appears moſt unnatural in Repartees, or ſhort Replies: when he who anſwers, (it being preſum'd he knew not what the other would ſay, yet) makes up that part of the Verſe which was left incompleat, and ſupplies both the ſound and meaſure of it. This, you ſay, looks rather like the confederacy of two, than the anſwer of one.

This, I confeſs, is an Objection which is in every Man's mouth who loves not Rhyme: but ſuppoſe, I beſeech you, the Repartee were made only in blank Verſe, might not part of the ſame Argument be turn'd againſt you? for the meaſure is as often ſupply'd there as it is in Rhyme. The latter half of the Hemyſtich as commonly made up, or a ſecond line ſubjoyn'd as a reply to the former; which any one leaf in *Johnſon*'s Plays will ſufficiently clear to you. You will often find in the Greek Tragedians, and in *Seneca*, that when a Scene grows up into the warmth of repartees, (which is the cloſe fighting of it) the latter part of the Trimeter is ſupply'd by him who anſwers; and yet it was never obſerv'd as a fault in them by any of the Ancient or Modern Criticks. The caſe is the ſame in our Verſe as it was in theirs; Rhyme to us being in lieu of quantity to them. But if no latitude is to be allow'd a Poet, you take from him not only his licence of *quidlibet audendi*, but you tie him up in a ſtraighter compaſs than you would a Philoſopher. This is indeed *Muſas colere ſeveriores*: You would have him follow Nature, but he muſt follow her on foot: you have diſmounted him from his *Pegaſus*. But you tell us, this ſupplying the laſt half of a Verſe, or adjoining a whole ſecond to the former, looks more like the deſign of two, than the anſwer of one. Suppoſe we acknowledge it: how comes this confederacy to be more diſpleaſing to you than in a Dance which is well contriv'd? You ſee there the united deſign of many perſons to make up one Figure: after they have ſeparated themſelves in many petty diviſions, they rejoyn one by one into a groſs: the confederacy is plain amongſt them; for chance could never produce any thing ſo beautiful, and yet there is nothing in it, that ſhocks your ſight. I acknowledge the hand of Art appears in Repartee, as of neceſſity it muſt in all kind of Verſe. But there is alſo the quick and poy-

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nant brevity of it (which is an high imitation of Nature in thoſe ſudden guſts of Paſſion) to mingle with it: and this join'd with the cadency and ſweetneſs of the Rhyme, leaves nothing in the Soul of the Hearer to deſire. 'Tis an Art which appears; but it appears only like the ſhadowings of Painture, which being to cauſe the rounding of it, cannot be abſent; but while that is conſidered they are loſt: ſo while we attend to the other Beauties of the matter, the Care and Labour of the Rhyme is carried from us, or at leaſt drown'd in its own Sweetneſs, as Bees are ſometimes buried in their Honey. When a Poet has found the Repartee, the laſt perfection he can add to iit, is, to put it into Verſe. However good the thought may be; however apt the words in which 'tis couch'd, yet he finds himſelf at a little unreſt, while Rhyme is wanting: he cannot leave it till that comes naturally, and then is at eaſe, and ſits down contented.

From Replies, which are the moſt elevated Thoughts of Verſe, you paſs to thoſe which are moſt mean, and which are common with the loweſt of houſhold Converſation. In theſe, you ſay, the Majeſty of Verſe ſuffers. You inſtance in the calling of a Servant, or commanding a Door to be ſhut in Rhyme. This, *Crites*, is a good Obſervation of yours, but no Argument: for it proves no more but that ſuch thoughts ſhould be wav'd, as often as may be, by the Addreſs of the Poet. But ſuppoſe they are neceſſary in the places where he uſes them, yet there is no need to put them into Rhyme. He may place them in the beginning of a Verſe, and break it off, as unfit, when ſo debas'd for any other uſe: or granting the worſt, that they require more Room than the Hemyſtick will allow; yet ſtill there is a choice to be made of the beſt words, and leaſt vulgar (provided they be apt) to expreſs ſuch thoughts. Many have blam'd Rhyme in general, for this fault, when the Poet, with a little Care, might have redreſs'd it. But they do it with no more Juſtice, than if *Engliſh* Poeſie ſhould be made ridiculous for the ſake of the Water-Poets Rhymes. Our Language is noble, full, and ſignificant; and I know not why he who is Maſter of it may not cloath ordinary things in it as decently as the *Latine*; if he uſe the ſame diligence in his choice of words.

Delectus verborum Origo eſt Eloquentiæ.

It was the Saying of *Julius Cæſar*, one ſo curious in his, that none of them can be chang'd but for a worſe. One would think unlock the door was a thing as vulgar as could be ſpoken; and yet *Seneca* could make it ſound high and lofty in his *Latine*.——

Reſerate cluſos Regii poſtes Laris.

Set wide the Palace Gates.

But

But I turn from this Exception, both becauſe it happens not above twice or thrice in any Play that thoſe vulgar Thoughts are us'd; and then too (were there no other Apology to be made, yet) the neceſſity of them (which is alike in all kind of writing) may excuſe them. For if they are little and mean in Rhyme, they are of conſequence ſuch in Blank Verſe. Beſides that the great eagerneſs and precipitation, with which they are ſpoken, makes us rather mind the Subſtance than the Dreſs; that for which they are ſpoken, rather than what is ſpoke. For they are always the effect of ſome haſty concernment, and ſomething of conſequence depends on them.

Thus, *Crites*, I have endeavour'd to anſwer your Objections; it remains only that I ſhould vindicate an Argument for Verſe, which you have gone about to overthrow. It had formerly been ſaid, that the eaſineſs of Blank Verſe, renders the Poet too luxuriant; but that the labour of Rhyme bounds and circumſcribes an over-fruitful Fancy. The Scene there being commonly confin'd to the Couplet, and the words ſo order'd that the Rhyme naturally follows them, not they the Rhyme. To this you anſwer'd, That it was no Argument to the Queſtion in hand, for the Diſpute was not which way a Man may write beſt; but which is moſt proper for the Subject on which he writes.

Firſt, give me leave, Sir, to remember you, that the Argument againſt which you rais'd this Objection, was only ſecondary: it was built on this *Hypotheſis*, that to write in Verſe was proper for ſerious Plays. Which ſuppoſition being granted (as it was briefly made out in that diſcourſe, by ſhewing how Verſe might be made natural) it aſſerted, that this way of writing was an help to the Poets Judgment, by putting bounds to a wild over-flowing Fancy. I think therefore it will not be hard for me to make good what it was to prove on that ſuppoſition. But you add, that were this let paſs, yet he who wants judgment in the liberty of his Fancy, may as well ſhew the defect of it when he is confin'd to Verſe: for he who has Judgment will avoid Errors; and he who has it not, will commit them in all kinds of writing.

This Argument, as you have taken it from a moſt acute Perſon, ſo, I confeſs, it carries much weight in it. But by uſing the word Judgement here indefinitely, you ſeem to have put a Fallacy upon us: I grant he who has Judgment, that is, ſo profound, ſo ſtrong, or rather ſo infallible a Judgment, that he needs no helps to keep it always pois'd and upright, will commit no faults either in Rhyme or out of it. And on the other extream; he who has a Judgment ſo weak and craz'd, that no helps can correct or amend it, ſhall write ſcurvily out of Rhyme, and worſe in it. But the firſt of theſe Judgments is no where to be found, and the latter is not fit to write at all. To ſpeak therefore of Judgment as it is in the beſt Poets: they who have the greateſt proportion of it, want other helps than from it within. As for example, you would be loth to ſay, that he who is indued with a ſound Judgement

ment has no need of Hiſtory, Geography, or Moral Philoſophy, to write correctly. Judgment is indeed the Maſter-workman in a Play: but he requires many ſubordinate hands, many tools to his Aſſiſtance. And Verſe I affirm to be one of theſe: 'Tis a Rule and Line by which he keeps his building compact and even, which otherwiſe lawleſs Imagination would raiſe either irregularly or looſly. At leaſt if the Poet commits Errors with this help, he would make greater and more without it: 'tis (in ſhort) a ſlow and painful, but the ſureſt kind of working. *Ovid*, whom you accuſe for luxuriancy in Verſe, had perhaps been farther guilty of it, had he writ in Proſe. And for your Inſtance of *Ben. Johnſon*, who, you ſay, writ exactly without the help of Rhyme; you are to remember 'tis only an aid to a luxuriant Fancy, which his was not: As he did not want Imagination, ſo none ever ſaid he had much to ſpare. Neither was Verſe then refin'd ſo much; to be an help to that Age, as it is to ours. Thus then the ſecond Thoughts being uſually the beſt, as receiving the maturelt digeſtion from Judgment, and the laſt and moſt mature product of theſe thoughts being artful and labour'd Verſe, it may well be inferr'd, that Verſe is a great help to a luxuriant Fancy; and this is what that Argument which you oppos'd was to evince.

Neander was purſuing this Diſcourſe ſo eagerly, that *Eugenius* had call'd to him twice or thrice 'ere he took notice that the Barge ſtood ſtill, and that they were at the Foot of *Somerſet*-Stairs, where they had appointed it to land. The Company were all ſorry to ſeparate ſo ſoon, tho' a great part of the Evening was already ſpent; and ſtood a-while looking back on the Water, upon which the Moon-beams play'd, and made it appear like floating Quick-ſilver: at laſt they went up thro' a Crowd of *French* People, who were merrily dancing in the open Air, and nothing concern'd for the noiſe of Guns, which had allarm'd the Town that Afternoon. Walking thence together to the *Piazze*, they parted there; *Eugenius* and *Liſideius* to ſome pleaſant Appointment they had made, and *Crites* and *Neander* to their ſeveral Lodgings.

FINIS.